Constantine I

(25 July 306 – 22 May 337)

BRIEFING

Constantine I (27 February 272 – 22 May 337), also known as Constantine the Great, was a Roman emperor from AD 306 to 337 and the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity. He played a pivotal role in elevating the status of Christianity in Rome, decriminalising Christian practice and ceasing Christian persecution. This was a turning point in the Christianisation of the Roman Empire. He founded the city of Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) and made it the capital of the Empire, which it remained for over a millennium.

Born in Naissus, a city located in the province of Moesia Superior (now Niš, Serbia), Constantine was the son of Flavius Constantius, a Roman army officer from Moesia Superior, who would become one of the four emperors of the Tetrarchy. His mother, Helena, was a woman of low birth, probably from Bithynia. Later canonised as a saint, she is credited for the conversion of her son in some traditions, though others believe that Constantine converted her. He served with distinction under emperors Diocletian and Galerius. He began his career by campaigning in the eastern provinces against the Persians, before being recalled to the west in AD 305 to fight alongside his father in the province of Britannia. After his father's death in 306, Constantine was proclaimed as *augustus* (emperor) by his army at Eboracum (York, England). He eventually emerged victorious in the civil wars against the emperors Maxentius and Licinius to become the sole ruler of the Roman Empire by 324.

Upon his accession, Constantine enacted numerous reforms to strengthen the empire. He restructured the government, separating civil and military authorities. To combat inflation, he introduced the solidus, a new gold coin that became the standard for Byzantine and European currencies for more than a thousand years. The Roman army was reorganised to consist of mobile units (*comitatenses*), often around the emperor, to serve on campaigns against external enemies or Roman rebels, and frontier-garrison troops (*limitanei*) which were capable of countering barbarian raids, but less and less capable, over time, of countering full-scale barbarian invasions. Constantine pursued successful campaigns against the tribes on the Roman frontiers—such as the Franks, the Alemanni, the Goths, and the Sarmatians—and resettled territories abandoned by his predecessors during the Crisis of the Third Century with citizens of Roman culture.

Although Constantine lived much of his life as a pagan and later as a catechumen, he began to favour Christianity beginning in 312, finally becoming a Christian and being baptised by Eusebius of Nicomedia, an Arian bishop, although the Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church maintain that he was baptised by Pope Sylvester I. He played an influential role in the proclamation of the Edict of Milan in 313, which declared tolerance for Christianity in the Roman Empire. He convoked the First Council of Nicaea in 325 which produced the statement of Christian belief known as the Nicene Creed. On his orders, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was built at the site claimed to be the tomb of Jesus in Jerusalem, and was deemed the holiest place in all of Christendom. The papal claim to temporal power in the High Middle Ages was based on the fabricated Donation of Constantine. He has historically been referred to as the "First Christian Emperor", but while he did favour the Christian Church, some modern scholars debate his beliefs and even his comprehension of Christianity. Nevertheless, he is venerated as a saint in Eastern Christianity, and he did much to push Christianity towards the mainstream of Roman culture.

The age of Constantine marked a distinct epoch in the history of the Roman Empire and a pivotal moment in the transition from classical antiquity to the Middle Ages. He built a new imperial residence in the city of Byzantium, which was officially renamed *New Rome*, while also taking on the name *Constantinople* in his honour. It subsequently served as the capital of the empire for more than a thousand years—with the Eastern Roman Empire for most of that period commonly referred to retrospectively as the *Byzantine Empire* in English. In leaving the empire to his sons and other members of the Constantinian dynasty, Constantine's immediate political legacy was the effective replacement of Diocletian's Tetrarchy with the principle of dynastic succession. His memory was held in high regard during the lifetime of his children and for centuries after his reign. The medieval church held him up as a paragon of virtue, while secular rulers invoked him as a symbol of imperial legitimacy. The rediscovery of anti-Constantinian sources in the early Renaissance engendered more critical appraisals of his reign, with modern and contemporary scholarship often seeking to balance the extremes of earlier accounts.

SOURCES

Constantine was a ruler of major importance and has always been a controversial figure. The fluctuations in his reputation reflect the nature of the ancient sources for his reign. These are abundant and detailed, but they have been strongly influenced by the official propaganda of the period and are often one-sided. No contemporaneous histories or biographies dealing with his life and rule have survived; the nearest alternative is Eusebius's *Vita Constantini*, which offers a mixture of eulogy and hagiography written between 335 and 339 to extol Constantine's moral and religious virtues. The *Vita* creates a contentiously positive image of Constantine, and modern historians have frequently challenged its reliability. The fullest secular life of Constantine is the anonymous *Origo Constantini*, a work of uncertain date which focuses on military and political events to the neglect of cultural and religious matters.

Lactantius' *De mortibus persecutorum*, a political Christian pamphlet on the reigns of Diocletian and the Tetrarchy, provides valuable but tendentious detail on Constantine's predecessors and early life. The ecclesiastical histories of Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret describe the ecclesiastic disputes of Constantine's later reign. Written during the reign of Theodosius II (r. 402–450), a century after Constantine's reign, these ecclesiastical historians obscure the events and theologies of the Constantinian period through misdirection, misrepresentation, and deliberate obscurity. The contemporary writings of the orthodox Christian Athanasius of Alexandria and the ecclesiastical history of the Arian Philostorgius also survive, though their biases are no less firm.

The epitomes of Aurelius Victor (*De Caesaribus*), Eutropius (*Breviarium*), Festus (*Breviarium*), and the anonymous author of the *Epitome de Caesaribus* offer compressed secular political and military histories of the period. Although not Christian, the epitomes paint a favourable image of Constantine but omit reference to Constantine's religious policies. The *Panegyrici Latini*, a collection of panegyrics from the late 3rd and early 4th centuries, provides valuable information on the politics and ideology of the tetrarchic period and the early life of Constantine. In addition, contemporary architecture—such as the Arch of Constantine in Rome and palaces in Gamzigrad and Córdoba—epigraphic remains, and the coinage of the era complement the literary sources.

EARLY LIFE

Constantine was born on 27 February 272. While his official birthday is recorded in sources, his year of birth is not, and scholars have given several estimates between 271 and 280, with most leaning for 272 or 273. However, the evidence points to 272 being the correct year. He was born inside the city of Naissus, during a time where the unity of the Empire was threatened by the breakaway wars of the Palmyrene Empire. The city (modern Niš, Serbia) was located in Dardania within the province of Moesia Superior. His father was Flavius Constantius, an Illyrian. His original full name, as well as that of his father, is not known. His *praenomen* is variously given as Lucius, Marcus and Gaius. Whatever the case, *praenomina* had already disappeared from most public records by this time. He also adopted the name "Valerius", the *nomen* of emperor Diocletian, following his father's ascension as caesar.

Constantine probably spent little time with his father who was an officer in the Roman army, part of Emperor Aurelian's imperial bodyguard. Being described as a tolerant and politically skilled man, Constantius advanced through the ranks, earning the governorship of Dalmatia from Emperor Diocletian, another of Aurelian's companions from Illyricum, in 284 or 285. Constantine's mother was Helena, a woman of low social standing, possibly from Drepanum (later renamed Helenopolis) of Bithynia, which would likely have made her a Greek-speaker. It is uncertain whether she was legally married to Constantius or merely his concubine. Constantine's own language was Latin, and during his public speeches in the church councils, which were held in Greek, he needed Greek translators.

In April 286 Diocletian declared Maximian, another colleague from Illyricum, his co-emperor. Each emperor would have his own court, his own military and administrative faculties, and each would rule with a separate praetorian prefect as chief lieutenant. Maximian ruled in the West, from his capitals at *Mediolanum* (Milan, Italy) or *Augusta Treverorum* (Trier, Germany), while Diocletian ruled in the East, from Nicomedia (İzmit, Turkey). The division was merely pragmatic: the empire was called "indivisible" in official panegyric, and both emperors could move freely throughout the empire. In 288, Maximian appointed Constantius to serve as his praetorian prefect in Gaul. Constantius left Helena to marry Maximian's stepdaughter Theodora in 288 or 289.

Diocletian divided the empire again in 293, appointing two caesars to rule over further subdivisions of East and West. Each would be subordinate to his respective *augustus* but would act with supreme authority in his assigned lands. This system would later be called the Tetrarchy. Diocletian's first appointee for the office of Caesar was Constantius; his second was Galerius, a native of *Felix Romuliana*. According to Lactantius, Galerius was a brutal, animalistic man. Although he shared the paganism of Rome's aristocracy, he seemed to them an alien figure, a semi-barbarian. On 1 March, Constantius was promoted to the office of *Caesar*, and dispatched to Gaul to fight the rebels Carausius and Allectus. In spite of meritocratic overtones, the Tetrarchy retained vestiges of hereditary privilege, and Constantine became the prime candidate for future appointment as Caesar as soon as his father took the position. Constantine went to the court of Diocletian, where he lived as his father's heir presumptive.

In the East

Constantine received a formal education at Diocletian's court, where he learned Latin literature, Greek, and philosophy. The cultural environment in Nicomedia was open, fluid, and socially mobile; in it, Constantine could mix with intellectuals both pagan and Christian. He may have attended the lectures of Lactantius, a Christian scholar of Latin in the city. Because Diocletian did not completely trust Constantius—none of the Tetrarchs fully trusted their colleagues—Constantine was held as something of a hostage, a tool to ensure Constantius' best behavior. Constantine was nonetheless a prominent member of the court: he fought for Diocletian and Galerius in Asia and served in a variety of tribunates; he campaigned against barbarians on the Danube in 296 and fought the Persians under Diocletian in Syria in 297, as well as under Galerius in Mesopotamia in 298–299. By late 305, according to some, he had become a tribune of the first order, a *tribunus ordinis primi*.

Constantine had returned to Nicomedia from the eastern front by the spring of 303, in time to witness the beginnings of Diocletian's "Great Persecution", the most severe persecution of Christians in Roman history. In late 302, Diocletian and Galerius sent a messenger to the oracle of Apollo at Didyma with an inquiry about Christians. Constantine could recall his presence at the palace when the messenger returned and Diocletian accepted the imperial court's demands for universal persecution. On 23 February 303, Diocletian ordered the destruction of Nicomedia s new church, condemned its scriptures to the flames, and had its treasures seized. In the months that followed, churches and scriptures were destroyed, Christians were deprived of official ranks, and priests were imprisoned. It is unlikely that Constantine played any role in the persecution. In his later writings, he attempted to present himself as an opponent of Diocletian's "sanguinary edicts" against the "Worshippers of God", but nothing indicates that he opposed it effectively at the time. Although no contemporary Christian challenged Constantine for his inaction during the persecutions, it remained a political liability throughout his life.

On 1 May 305 Diocletian, as a result of a debilitating sickness taken in the winter of 304–305, announced his resignation. In a parallel ceremony in Milan, Maximian did the same. Lactantius states that Galerius manipulated the weakened Diocletian into resigning and forced him to accept Galerius' allies in the imperial succession. According to Lactantius, the crowd listening to Diocletian's resignation speech believed, until the last moment, that Diocletian would choose Constantine and Maxentius (Maximian's son) as his successors. It was not to be: Constantius and Galerius were promoted to *augusti*, while Severus and Maximinus, Galerius' nephew, were appointed their caesars respectively. Constantine and Maxentius were ignored.

Some of the ancient sources detail plots that Galerius made on Constantine's life in the months following Diocletian's abdication. They assert that Galerius assigned Constantine to lead an advance unit in a cavalry charge through a swamp on the middle Danube, made him enter into single combat with a lion, and attempted to kill him in hunts and wars. Constantine always emerged victorious: the lion emerged from the contest in a poorer condition than Constantine; Constantine returned to Nicomedia from the Danube with a Sarmatian captive to drop at Galerius' feet. It is uncertain how much these tales can be trusted.

In the West

Constantine recognised the implicit danger in remaining at Galerius' court, where he was held as a virtual hostage. His career depended on being rescued by his father in the West. Constantius was quick to intervene. In the late spring or early summer of 305, Constantius requested leave for his son to help him campaign in Britain. After a long evening of drinking, Galerius granted the request. Constantine's later propaganda describes how he fled the court in the night, before Galerius could change his mind. He rode from post-house to post-house at high speed, hamstringing every horse in his wake. By the time Galerius awoke the following morning, Constantine had fled too far to be caught. Constantine joined his father in Gaul, at *Bononia* (Boulogne) before the summer of 305.

From Bononia they crossed the English Channel to Britain and made their way to Eboracum (York), capital of the province of Britannia Secunda and home to a large military base. Constantine was able to spend a year in northern Britain at his father's side, campaigning against the Picts beyond Hadrian's Wall in the summer and autumn. Constantius' campaign, like that of Septimius Severus before it, probably advanced far into the north without achieving great success. Constantius had become severely sick over the course of his reign and died on 25 July 306 in Eboracum. Before dying, he declared his support for raising Constantine as emperor. The Alamannic king Chrocus, a barbarian taken into service under Constantius, then proclaimed Constantine as augustus. The troops loyal to Constantius' memory followed him in acclamation. Gaul and Britain quickly accepted his rule; Hispania, which had been in his father's domain for less than a year, rejected it.

Constantine sent Galerius an official notice of Constantius' death and his own acclamation. Along with the notice, he included a portrait of himself in the robes of an Augustus. The portrait was wreathed in bay. He requested recognition as heir to his father's throne and passed off responsibility for his unlawful ascension on his army, claiming they had "forced it upon him". Galerius was put into a fury by the message; he almost set the portrait and messenger on fire. His advisers calmed him and argued that outright denial of Constantine's claims would mean certain war. Galerius was compelled to compromise: he granted Constantine the title "caesar" rather than "augustus" (the latter office went to Severus instead). Wishing to make it clear that he alone gave Constantine legitimacy, Galerius personally sent Constantine the emperor's traditional purple robes. Constantine accepted the decision, knowing that it would remove doubts as to his legitimacy.

REIGN

Constantine's share of the empire consisted of Britain, Gaul, and Spain, and he commanded one of the largest Roman armies which was stationed along the important Rhine frontier. He remained in Britain after his promotion to emperor, driving back the tribes of the Picts and securing his control in the northwestern dioceses. He completed the reconstruction of military bases begun under his father's rule, and he ordered the repair of the region's roadways. He then left for *Augusta Treverorum* (Trier) in Gaul, the Tetrarchic capital of the northwestern Roman Empire. The Franks learned of Constantine's acclamation and invaded Gaul across the lower Rhine over the winter of 306–307. He drove them back beyond the Rhine and captured kings Ascaric and Merogais; the kings and their soldiers were fed to the beasts of Trier Amphitheater in the *adventus* (arrival) celebrations which followed.

Constantine began a major expansion of Trier. He strengthened the circuit wall around the city with military towers and fortified gates, and he began building a palace complex in the northeastern part of the city. To the south of his palace, he ordered the construction of a large formal audience hall and a massive imperial bathhouse. He sponsored many building projects throughout Gaul during his tenure as emperor of the West, especially in Augustodunum (Autun) and Arelate (Arles). According to Lactantius, Constantine followed a tolerant policy towards Christianity, although he was not yet a Christian. He probably judged it a more sensible policy than open persecution and a way to distinguish himself from the "great persecutor" Galerius. He decreed a formal end to persecution and returned to Christians all that they had lost under the first of the persecuting edicts.

Constantine was largely untried and had a hint of illegitimacy about him; he relied on his father's reputation in his early propaganda, which gave as much coverage to his father's deeds as to his. His military skill and building projects, however, soon gave the panegyrist the opportunity to comment favourably on the similarities between father and son, and Eusebius remarked that Constantine was a "renewal, as it were, in his own person, of his father's life and reign". Constantinian coinage, sculpture, and oratory also show a tendency for disdain towards the "barbarians" beyond the frontiers. He minted a coin issue after his victory over the Alemanni which depicts weeping and begging Alemannic tribesmen, "the Alemanni conquered" beneath the phrase "Romans' rejoicing". There was little sympathy for these enemies; as his panegyrist declared, "It is a stupid clemency that spares the conquered foe."

Maxentius's Rebellion

Following Galerius's recognition of Constantine as caesar, Constantine's portrait was brought to Rome, as was customary. Maxentius mocked the portrait's subject as the son of a harlot and lamented his own powerlessness. Maxentius, envious of Constantine's authority, seized the title of emperor on 28 October 306. Galerius refused to recognise him but failed to unseat him. Severus was sent against Maxentius in April 307, but during the campaign, Severus' armies, previously under command of Maxentius' father Maximian, defected, and Severus was seized and imprisoned. Maximian, brought out of retirement by his son's rebellion, left for Gaul to confer with Constantine. He offered to marry his daughter Fausta to Constantine and elevate him to augustan rank. In return, Constantine would reaffirm the old family alliance between Maximian and Constantius and offer support to Maxentius' cause in Italy. Constantine accepted and married Fausta in Trier in summer 307. Constantine gave Maxentius his meagre support, offering Maxentius political recognition.

Constantine remained aloof from the Italian conflict, however. Over the spring and summer of 307 he had left Gaul for Britain to avoid any involvement in the Italian turmoil; now, instead of giving Maxentius military aid, he sent his troops against Germanic tribes along the Rhine. In 308, he raided the territory of the Bructeri and made a bridge across the Rhine at Colonia Agrippinensium (Cologne). In 310, he marched to the northern Rhine and fought the Franks. When not campaigning, he toured his lands advertising his benevolence and supporting the economy and the arts. His refusal to participate in the war increased his popularity among his people and strengthened his power base in the West. Maximian returned to Rome in the winter of 307–308 but soon fell out with his son. In early 308, after a failed attempt to usurp Maxentius' title, Maximian returned to Constantine's court.

On 11 November 308 Galerius called a general council at the military city of Carnuntum (Petronell-Carnuntum, Austria) to resolve the instability in the western provinces. In attendance were Diocletian, briefly returned from retirement, Galerius, and Maximian. Maximian was forced to abdicate again and Constantine was again demoted to caesar. Licinius, one of Galerius' old military companions, was appointed augustus in the western regions. The new system did not last long: Constantine refused to accept the demotion and continued to style himself as augustus on his coinage, even as other members of the Tetrarchy referred to him as a caesar on theirs. Maximinus was frustrated that he had been passed over for promotion while the newcomer Licinius had been raised to the office of augustus and demanded that Galerius promote him. Galerius offered to call both Maximinus and Constantine "sons of the augusti", but neither accepted the new title. By the spring of 310, Galerius was referring to both men as augusti.

Maximian's Rebellion

In 310 a dispossessed Maximian rebelled against Constantine while Constantine was away campaigning against the Franks. Maximian had been sent south to Arles with a contingent of Constantine's army, in preparation for any attacks by Maxentius in southern Gaul. He announced that Constantine was dead and took up the imperial purple. In spite of a large donative pledge to any who would support him as emperor, most of Constantine's army remained loyal to their emperor, and Maximian was soon compelled to leave. When Constantine heard of the rebellion, he abandoned his campaign against the Franks and marched his army up the Rhine. At Cabillunum (Chalon-sur-Saône), he moved his troops onto waiting boats to row down the slow waters of the Saône to the quicker waters of the Rhone. He disembarked at Lugdunum (Lyon). Maximian fled to Massilia (Marseille), a town better able to withstand a long siege than Arles. It made little difference, however, as loyal citizens opened the rear gates to Constantine. Maximian was captured and reproved for his crimes. Constantine granted some clemency but strongly encouraged his suicide. In July 310, Maximian hanged himself.

In spite of the earlier rupture in their relations, Maxentius was eager to present himself as his father's devoted son after his death. He began minting coins with his father's deified image, proclaiming his desire to avenge Maximian's death. Constantine initially presented the suicide as an unfortunate family tragedy. By 311, however, he was spreading another version. According to this, after Constantine had pardoned him, Maximian planned to murder Constantine in his sleep. Fausta learned of the plot and warned Constantine, who put a eunuch in his own place in bed. Maximian was apprehended when he killed the eunuch and was offered suicide, which he accepted. Along with using propaganda, Constantine instituted a *damnatio memoriae* on Maximian, destroying all inscriptions referring to him and eliminating any public work bearing his image.

The death of Maximian required a shift in Constantine's public image. He could no longer rely on his connection to the elder Emperor Maximian and needed a new source of legitimacy. In a speech delivered in Gaul on 25 July 310, the anonymous orator reveals a previously unknown dynastic connection to Claudius II, a 3rd-century emperor famed for defeating the Goths and restoring order to the empire. Breaking away from tetrarchic models, the speech emphasises Constantine's ancestral prerogative to rule, rather than principles of imperial equality. The new ideology expressed in the speech made Galerius and Maximian irrelevant to Constantine's right to rule. Indeed, the orator emphasises ancestry to the exclusion of all other factors: "No chance agreement of men, nor some unexpected consequence of favour, made you emperor," the orator declares to Constantine.

The oration also moves away from the religious ideology of the Tetrarchy, with its focus on twin dynasties of Jupiter and Hercules. Instead, the orator proclaims that Constantine experienced a divine vision of Apollo and Victory granting him laurel wreaths of health and a long reign. In the likeness of Apollo, Constantine recognised himself as the saving figure to whom would be granted "rule of the whole world", as the poet Virgil had once foretold. The oration's religious shift is paralleled by a similar shift in Constantine's coinage. In his early reign, the coinage of Constantine advertised Mars as his patron. From 310 on, Mars was replaced by Sol Invictus, a god conventionally identified with Apollo. There is little reason to believe that either the dynastic connection or the divine vision are anything other than fiction, but their proclamation strengthened Constantine's claims to legitimacy and increased his popularity among the citizens of Gaul.

Civil Wars

War against Maxentius

By the middle of 310 Galerius had become too ill to involve himself in imperial politics. His final act survives: a letter to provincials posted in *Nicomedia* on 30 April 311, proclaiming an end to the persecutions, and the resumption of religious toleration.

Eusebius maintains "divine providence took action against the perpetrator of these crimes" and gives a graphic account of Galerius' demise:

"Without warning suppurative inflammation broke out round the middle of his genitals, then a deep-seated fistula ulcer; these ate their way incurably into his innermost bowels. From them came a teeming indescribable mass of worms, and a sickening smell was given off, for the whole of his hulking body, thanks to over eating, had been transformed even before his illness into a huge lump of flabby fat, which then decomposed and presented those who came near it with a revolting and horrifying sight."

Galerius died soon after the edict's proclamation, destroying what little remained of the Tetrarchy. Maximinus mobilised against Licinius and seized Asia Minor. A hasty peace was signed on a boat in the middle of the Bosphorus. While Constantine toured Britain and Gaul, Maxentius prepared for war. He fortified northern Italy and strengthened his support in the Christian community by allowing it to elect Eusebius as bishop of Rome.

Maxentius' rule was nevertheless insecure. His early support dissolved in the wake of heightened tax rates and depressed trade; riots broke out in Rome and Carthage; and Domitius Alexander was able to briefly usurp his authority in Africa. By 312, he was a man barely tolerated, not one actively supported, even among Christian Italians. In the summer of 311, Maxentius mobilised against Constantine while Licinius was occupied with affairs in the East. He declared war on Constantine, vowing to avenge his father's "murder". To prevent Maxentius from forming an alliance against him with Licinius, Constantine forged his own alliance with Licinius over the winter of 311–312 and offered him his sister Constantia in marriage. Maximinus considered Constantine's arrangement with Licinius an affront to his authority. In response, he sent ambassadors to Rome, offering political recognition to Maxentius in exchange for a military support, which Maxentius accepted. According to Eusebius, inter-regional travel became impossible, and there was military buildup everywhere. There was "not a place where people were not expecting the onset of hostilities every day".

Constantine's advisers and generals cautioned against preemptive attack on Maxentius; even his soothsayers recommended against it, stating that the sacrifices had produced unfavourable omens. Constantine, with a spirit that left a deep impression on his followers, inspiring some to believe that he had some form of supernatural guidance, ignored all these cautions. Early in the spring of 312, Constantine crossed the Cottian Alps with a quarter of his army, a force numbering about 40,000. The first town his army encountered was *Segusium* (Susa, Italy), a heavily fortified town that shut its gates to him. Constantine ordered his men to set fire to its gates and scale its walls. He took the town quickly. Constantine ordered his troops not to loot the town and advanced into northern Italy.

At the approach to the west of the important city of Augusta Taurinorum (Turin, Italy), Constantine met a large force of heavily armed Maxentian cavalry. In the ensuing Battle of Turin Constantine's army encircled Maxentius' cavalry, flanked them with his own cavalry, and dismounted them with blows from his soldiers' iron-tipped clubs. Constantine's armies emerged victorious. Turin refused to give refuge to Maxentius' retreating forces, opening its gates to Constantine instead. Other cities of the north Italian plain sent Constantine embassies of congratulation for his victory. He moved on to Milan, where he was met with open gates and jubilant rejoicing. Constantine rested his army in Milan until mid-summer 312, when he moved on to Brixia (Brescia).

Brescia's army was easily dispersed, and Constantine quickly advanced to Verona where a large Maxentian force was camped. Ruricius Pompeianus, general of the Veronese forces and Maxentius' praetorian prefect, was in a strong defensive position since the town was surrounded on three sides by the Adige. Constantine sent a small force north of the town in an attempt to cross the river unnoticed. Ruricius sent a large detachment to counter Constantine's expeditionary force but was defeated. Constantine's forces successfully surrounded the town and laid siege. Ruricius gave Constantine the slip and returned with a larger force to oppose Constantine. Constantine refused to let up on the siege and sent only a small force to oppose him. In the desperately fought encounter that followed, Ruricius was killed and his army destroyed. Verona surrendered soon afterwards, followed by Aquileia, Mutina (Modena), and Ravenna. The road to Rome was now wide open to Constantine.

Maxentius prepared for the same type of war he had waged against Severus and Galerius: he occupied Rome and prepared for a siege. He still controlled Rome's Praetorian Guard, was well-stocked with African grain, and was surrounded on all sides by the seemingly impregnable Aurelian Walls. He ordered all bridges across the Tiber cut, reportedly on the counsel of the gods, and left the rest of central Italy undefended; Constantine secured that region's support without challenge. Constantine progressed slowly along the *Via Flaminia*, allowing the weakness of Maxentius to draw his regime further into turmoil. Maxentius' support continued to weaken: at chariot races on 27 October, the crowd openly taunted Maxentius, shouting that Constantine was invincible. Maxentius, no longer certain that he would emerge from a siege victorious, built a temporary boat bridge across the Tiber in preparation for a field battle against Constantine. On 28 October 312, the sixth anniversary of his reign, he approached the keepers of the Sibylline Books for guidance. The keepers prophesied that, on that very day, "the enemy of the Romans" would die. Maxentius advanced north to meet Constantine in battle.

Maxentius' forces were still twice the size of Constantine's, and he organised them in long lines facing the battle plain with their backs to the river. Constantine's army arrived on the field bearing unfamiliar symbols on their standards and their shields. According to Lactantius "Constantine was directed in a dream to cause the heavenly sign to be delineated on the shields of his soldiers, and so to proceed to battle. He did as he had been commanded, and he marked on their shields the letter X, with a perpendicular line drawn through it and turned round thus at the top, being the cipher of Christ. Having this sign (☧), his troops stood to arms." Eusebius describes a vision that Constantine had while marching at midday in which "he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and bearing the inscription, *In Hoc Signo Vinces*" ("In this sign thou shalt conquer"). In Eusebius' account, Constantine had a dream the following night in which Christ appeared with the same heavenly sign and told him to make an army standard in the form of the *labarum*. Eusebius is vague about when and where these events took place, but it enters his narrative before the war begins against Maxentius. He describes the sign as Chi (X) traversed by Rho (P) to form ☧, representing the first two letters of the Greek word ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ (Christos). A medallion was issued at Ticinum in 315 which shows Constantine wearing a helmet emblazoned with the *Chi Rho*, and coins issued at Siscia in 317/318 repeat the image. The figure was otherwise rare and is uncommon in imperial iconography and propaganda before the 320s. It was not completely unknown, however, being an abbreviation of the Greek word chrēston (good), having previously appeared on the coins of Ptolemy III Euergetes in the 3rd century BC. Following Constantine, centuries of Christians invoked the miraculous or the supernatural when justifying or describing their warfare.

Constantine deployed his own forces along the whole length of Maxentius' line. He ordered his cavalry to charge, and they broke Maxentius' cavalry. He then sent his infantry against Maxentius' infantry, pushing many into the Tiber where they were slaughtered and drowned. The battle was brief, and Maxentius' troops were broken before the first charge. His horse guards and praetorians initially held their position, but they broke under the force of a Constantinian cavalry charge; they also broke ranks and fled to the river. Maxentius rode with them and attempted to cross the bridge of boats (Ponte Milvio), but he was pushed into the Tiber and drowned by the mass of his fleeing soldiers.

Battle of the Milvian Bridge

The Battle of the Milvian Bridge took place between the Roman Emperors Constantine I and Maxentius on 28 October AD 312. It takes its name from the Milvian Bridge, an important route over the Tiber. Constantine won the battle and started on the path that led him to end the Tetrarchy and become the sole ruler of the Roman Empire. Maxentius drowned in the Tiber during the battle; his body was later taken from the river and decapitated, and his head was paraded through the streets of Rome on the day following the battle before being sent to Africa.

According to Christian chroniclers Eusebius of Caesarea and Lactantius, the battle marked the beginning of Constantine's conversion to Christianity. Eusebius of Caesarea recounts that Constantine and his soldiers had a vision sent by the Christian God. This was interpreted as a promise of victory if the sign of the Chi Rho, the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek, was painted on the soldiers' shields. The Arch of Constantine, erected in celebration of the victory, certainly attributes Constantine's success to divine intervention; however, the monument does not display any overtly Christian symbolism.

Historical Background

The underlying causes of the battle were the rivalries inherent in Diocletian's Tetrarchy. After Diocletian stepped down on 1 May 305, his successors began to struggle for control of the Roman Empire almost immediately. Although Constantine was the son of the Western Emperor Constantius, the Tetrarchic ideology did not necessarily provide for hereditary succession. When Constantius died on 25 July 306, his father's troops proclaimed Constantine as Augustus in Eboracum (York). In Rome, the favorite was Maxentius, the son of Constantius' imperial colleague Maximian, who seized the title of emperor on 28 October 306. But whereas Constantine's claim was recognized by Galerius, ruler of the Eastern provinces and the senior emperor in the Empire, Maxentius was treated as a usurper. Galerius, however, recognized Constantine as holding only the lesser imperial rank of Caesar. Galerius ordered his co-Augustus, Severus, to put Maxentius down in early 307. Once Severus arrived in Italy, however, his army defected to Maxentius. Severus was captured, imprisoned, and executed. Galerius himself marched on Rome in the autumn, but failed to take the city. Constantine avoided conflict with both Maxentius and the Eastern emperors for most of this period.

By 312, however, Constantine and Maxentius were engaged in open hostility with one another, although they were brothers-in-law through Constantine's marriage to Fausta, sister of Maxentius. In the spring of 312, Constantine gathered an army of around 40,000 soldiers (although the ancient historian Zosimus "claimed, quite implausibly, that Constantine invaded Italy with 90,000 soldiers and 8,000 cavalry, and that Maxentius commanded an army of 170,000 soldiers and 18,000 cavalry, including 80,000 Italians and 40,000 Carthaginians") and decided to oust Maxentius himself. He easily overran northern Italy, winning two major battles: the first near Turin, the second at Verona, where the praetorian prefect Ruricius Pompeianus, Maxentius' most senior general, was killed.

Vision of Constantine

It is commonly understood that on the evening of 27 October with the armies preparing for battle, Constantine had a vision which led him to fight under the protection of the Christian God. Some details of that vision, however, differ between the sources reporting it.

Lactantius states that, on the night before the battle, Constantine was commanded in a dream to "delineate the heavenly sign on the shields of his soldiers" (*On the Deaths of the Persecutors* 44.5). He followed the commands of his dream and marked the shields with a sign "denoting Christ". Lactantius describes that sign as a "staurogram", or a Latin cross with its upper end rounded in a P-like fashion. There is no certain evidence that Constantine ever used that sign, as opposed to the better known Chi-Rho sign described by Eusebius.

From Eusebius, two accounts of the battle survive. The first, shorter one in the *Ecclesiastical History* promotes the belief that the Christian God helped Constantine but does not mention any vision. In his later *Life of Constantine*, Eusebius gives a detailed account of a vision and stresses that he had heard the story from the Emperor himself. According to this version, Constantine with his army was marching (Eusebius does not specify the actual location of the event, but it was clearly not in the camp at Rome), when he looked up to the sun and saw a cross of light above it, and with it the Greek words " Ἐν Τούτῳ Νίκα", *En toutōi níka*, usually translated into Latin as "*in hoc signo vinces*". The literal meaning of the phrase in Greek is "in this (sign), conquer" while in Latin it's "in this sign, you shall conquer"; a more free translation would be "Through this sign [you shall] conquer". At first he was unsure of the meaning of the apparition, but in the following night he had a dream in which Christ explained to him that he should use the sign against his enemies. Eusebius then continues to describe the labarum, the military standard used by Constantine in his later wars against Licinius, showing the Chi-Rho sign.

The accounts of the two contemporary authors, though not entirely consistent, have been merged into a popular notion of Constantine seeing the Chi-Rho sign on the evening before the battle. Both authors agree that the sign was not widely understandable to denote Christ (although among the Christians, it was already being used in the catacombs along with other special symbols to mark and/or decorate Christian tombs). Its first imperial appearance is on a Constantinian silver coin from c. 317, which proves that Constantine did use the sign at that time, though not very prominently. He made more extensive use of the Chi-Rho and the Labarum later, during the conflict with Licinius.

Some have considered the vision in a solar context (e.g. as a solar halo phenomenon called a sun dog), which may have preceded the Christian beliefs later expressed by Constantine. Coins of Constantine depicting him as the companion of a solar deity were minted as late as 313, the year following the battle. The solar deity Sol Invictus is often pictured with a nimbus or halo. Various emperors portrayed Sol Invictus on their official coinage, with a wide range of legends, only a few of which incorporated the epithet *invictus*, such as the legend SOLI INVICTO COMITI, claiming the Unconquered Sun as a companion to the emperor, used with particular frequency by Constantine. Constantine's official coinage continues to bear images of Sol until 325/6. A solidus of Constantine as well as a gold medallion from his reign depict the Emperor's bust in profile jugate with Sol Invictus, with the legend INVICTUS CONSTANTINUS. The official cults of Sol Invictus and Sol Invictus Mithras were popular amongst the soldiers of the Roman Army. Statuettes of Sol Invictus, carried by the standard-bearers, appear in three places in reliefs on the Arch of Constantine. Constantine's triumphal arch was carefully positioned to align with the colossal statue of Sol by the Colosseum, so that Sol formed the dominant backdrop when seen from the direction of the main approach towards the arch.

However, other historians have discounted Eusebius's later account of a vision entirely. John Julius Norwich argued that "the vision of the Cross above the battlefield ... never occurred. Had it done so, it is unthinkable that there should not be a single reference to it in any of the contemporary histories until the *Life of Constantine*", and that Eusebius's "specific statement that 'the whole army ... witnessed the miracle'" is implausible. On the other hand, Norwich did concede that shortly before the battle, Constantine must have undergone "some profound spiritual experience", and that Eusebius's story was likely not so much "a deliberate falsehood" as "a possibly unconscious exaggeration", with Constantine adding "a gentle gloss" to his recollections which the author then uncritically noted down or embellished.

Events of the Battle

Constantine reached Rome at the end of October 312 approaching along the Via Flaminia. He camped at the location of Malborghetto near Prima Porta, where remains of a Constantinian monument, the Arch of Malborghetto, which was built in honour of the occasion, are still extant.

It was expected that Maxentius would remain within Rome and endure a siege; he had successfully employed this strategy twice before, during the invasions of Severus and Galerius. Indeed, Maxentius had organised the stockpiling of large amounts of food in the city in preparation for such an event. Surprisingly, he decided otherwise, choosing to meet Constantine in open battle. Ancient sources commenting on these events attribute this decision either to divine intervention (Lactantius and Eusebius, both of whom were Christians) or superstition (Zosimus, who was a pagan). They also note that the day of the battle was the same as the day of his accession (28 October), which was generally thought to be a good omen. Additionally, Maxentius is reported to have consulted the oracular Sibylline Books, which stated that "on October 28 an enemy of the Romans would perish". Maxentius interpreted this prophecy as being favourable to himself. Lactantius also reports that the populace supported Constantine with acclamations during circus games. Maxentius chose to make his stand in front of the Milvian Bridge, a stone bridge that carries the Via Flaminia road across the Tiber River into Rome (the bridge stands today at the same site, somewhat remodelled, named in Italian *Ponte Milvio* or sometimes *Ponte Molle*, "soft bridge"). Holding it was essential if Maxentius was to keep his rival out of Rome, where the Senate would surely favour whoever held the city. As Maxentius had probably partially destroyed the bridge during his preparations for a siege, he had a wooden or pontoon bridge constructed to get his army across the river. The sources vary as to the nature of the bridge central to the events of the battle. Zosimus mentions it, vaguely, as being constructed in two parts connected by iron fastenings, while others indicate that it was a pontoon bridge; sources are also unclear as to whether the bridge was deliberately constructed as a collapsible trap for Constantine's forces or not.

The next day, the two armies clashed, and Constantine won a decisive victory. The dispositions of Maxentius may have been faulty as his troops seem to have been arrayed with the River Tiber too close to their rear, giving them little space to allow re-grouping in the event of their formations being forced to give ground. Already known as a skillful general, Constantine first launched his cavalry at the cavalry of Maxentius and broke them. Constantine's infantry then advanced; most of Maxentius's troops fought well but they began to be pushed back toward the Tiber. Maxentius then decided to order a retreat, intending to make another stand at Rome itself. However, there was only one escape route, via the bridge. Constantine's men inflicted heavy losses on the retreating army. Finally, the temporary bridge set up alongside the Milvian Bridge, over which many of the Maxentian troops were escaping, collapsed, and those stranded on the north bank of the Tiber were either taken prisoner or killed. Maxentius' Praetorian Guard, who had originally acclaimed him emperor, seem to have made a stubborn stand on the northern bank of the river; "in despair of pardon they covered with their bodies the place which they had chosen for combat."

Maxentius was among the dead, having drowned in the river while trying to swim across it in an attempt to escape or, alternatively, he is described as having been thrown by his horse into the river. Lactantius describes the death of Maxentius in the following manner: "The bridge in his rear was broken down. At sight of that the battle grew hotter. The hand of the Lord prevailed, and the forces of Maxentius were routed. He fled towards the broken bridge; but the multitude pressing on him, he was driven headlong into the Tiber."

Aftermath

Constantine entered Rome on 29 October. He staged a grand arrival ceremony in the city (*adventus)*, and was met with popular jubilation. Maxentius' body was fished out of the Tiber and decapitated. His head was paraded through the streets for all to see. After the ceremonies, Maxentius' head was sent to Carthage as proof of his downfall; Africa then offered no further resistance. The battle gave Constantine undisputed control of the western half of the Roman Empire. The descriptions of Constantine's entry into Rome omit mention of him ending his procession at the temple of Capitoline Jupiter, where sacrifice was usually offered. Though often employed to show Constantine's Christian sensibilities, this silence cannot be taken as proof that Constantine was a Christian at this point. He chose to honour the Senatorial Curia with a visit, where he promised to restore its ancestral privileges and give it a secure role in his reformed government: there would be no revenge against Maxentius' supporters. Maxentius was condemned to *damnatio memoriae*; all his legislation was invalidated and Constantine usurped all of Maxentius' considerable building projects within Rome, including the Temple of Romulus and the Basilica of Maxentius. Maxentius' strongest supporters in the military were neutralized when the Praetorian Guard and Imperial Horse Guard (*equites singulares*) were disbanded. Constantine is thought to have replaced the former imperial guards with a number of cavalry units termed the *Scholae Palatinae*.

Significance

Paul K. Davis writes that, "Constantine's victory gave him total control of the Western Roman Empire paving the way for Christianity to become the dominant religion for the Roman Empire and ultimately for Europe." The following year, 313, Constantine and Licinius issued the Edict of Milan, which made Christianity an officially recognised and tolerated religion in the Roman Empire.

In Rome

Constantine entered Rome on 29 October 312 and staged a grand *adventus* in the city which was met with jubilation. Maxentius' body was fished out of the Tiber and decapitated, and his head was paraded through the streets for all to see. After the ceremonies, the disembodied head was sent to Carthage, and Carthage offered no further resistance. Unlike his predecessors, Constantine neglected to make the trip to the Capitoline Hill and perform customary sacrifices at the Temple of Jupiter. However, he did visit the Senatorial Curia Julia, and he promised to restore its ancestral privileges and give it a secure role in his reformed government; there would be no revenge against Maxentius' supporters. In response, the Senate decreed him "title of the first name", which meant that his name would be listed first in all official documents, and they acclaimed him as "the greatest augustus". He issued decrees returning property that was lost under Maxentius, recalling political exiles, and releasing Maxentius' imprisoned opponents.

An extensive propaganda campaign followed, during which Maxentius' image was purged from all public places. He was written up as a "tyrant" and set against an idealised image of Constantine the "liberator". Eusebius is the best representative of this strand of Constantinian propaganda. Maxentius' rescripts were declared invalid, and the honours that he had granted to leaders of the Senate were also invalidated. Constantine also attempted to remove Maxentius' influence on Rome's urban landscape. All structures built by him were rededicated to Constantine, including the Temple of Romulus and the Basilica of Maxentius. At the focal point of the basilica, a stone statue was erected of Constantine holding the Christian *labarum* in its hand. Its inscription bore the message which the statue illustrated: "By this sign, Constantine had freed Rome from the yoke of the tyrant."

Constantine also sought to upstage Maxentius' achievements. For example, the Circus Maximus was redeveloped so that its seating capacity was 25 times larger than that of Maxentius' racing complex on the Via Appia. Maxentius' strongest military supporters were neutralised when Constantine disbanded the Praetorian Guard and Imperial Horse Guard. The tombstones of the Imperial Horse Guard were ground up and used in a basilica on the Via Labicana, and their former base was redeveloped into the Lateran Basilica on 9 November 312—barely two weeks after Constantine captured the city. The Legio II Parthica was removed from Albano Laziale, and the remainder of Maxentius' armies were sent to do frontier duty on the Rhine.

Wars against Licinius

In the following years, Constantine gradually consolidated his military superiority over his rivals in the crumbling Tetrarchy. In 313, he met Licinius in Milan to secure their alliance by the marriage of Licinius and Constantine's half-sister Constantia. During this meeting, the emperors agreed on the so-called Edict of Milan, officially granting full tolerance to Christianity and all religions in the empire. The document had special benefits for Christians, legalising their religion and granting them restoration for all property seized during Diocletian's persecution. It repudiates past methods of religious coercion and used only general terms to refer to the divine sphere—"Divinity" and "Supreme Divinity", *summa divinitas*. The conference was cut short, however, when news reached Licinius that his rival Maximinus had crossed the Bosporus and invaded European territory. Licinius departed and eventually defeated Maximinus, gaining control over the entire eastern half of the Roman Empire. Relations between the two remaining emperors deteriorated, as Constantine suffered an assassination attempt at the hands of a character that Licinius wanted elevated to the rank of Caesar; Licinius, for his part, had Constantine's statues in Emona destroyed. In either 314 or 316 the two augusti fought against one another at the Battle of Cibalae, with Constantine being victorious. They clashed again at the Battle of Mardia in 317 and agreed to a settlement in which Constantine's sons Crispus and Constantine II, and Licinius' son Licinius Junior were made *caesars*. After this arrangement, Constantine ruled the dioceses of Pannonia and Macedonia and took residence at Sirmium, whence he could wage war on the Goths and Sarmatians in 322, and on the Goths in 323, defeating and killing their leader Rausimod.

In 320 Licinius allegedly reneged on the religious freedom promised by the Edict of Milan and began to oppress Christians anew, generally without bloodshed, but resorting to confiscations and sacking of Christian office-holders. Although this characterisation of Licinius as anti-Christian is somewhat doubtful, the fact is that he seems to have been far less open in his support of Christianity than Constantine. Therefore, Licinius was prone to see the Church as a force more loyal to Constantine than to the Imperial system in general, as the explanation offered by the Church historian Sozomen.

This dubious arrangement eventually became a challenge to Constantine in the West, climaxing in the great civil war of 324. Constantine's Christian eulogists present the war as a battle between Christianity and paganism; Licinius, aided by Gothic mercenaries, represented the past and ancient paganism, while Constantine and his Franks marched under the standard of the *labarum*. Outnumbered but fired by their zeal, Constantine's army emerged victorious in the Battle of Adrianople. Licinius fled across the Bosphorus and appointed Martinian, his *magister officiorum*, as nominal augustus in the West, but Constantine next won the Battle of the Hellespont and finally the Battle of Chrysopolis on 18 September 324. Licinius and Martinian surrendered to Constantine at *Nicomedia* on the promise their lives would be spared: they were sent to live as private citizens in Thessalonica and Cappadocia respectively, but in 325 Constantine accused Licinius of plotting against him and had them both arrested and hanged; Licinius' son (the son of Constantine's half-sister) was killed in 326. Thus Constantine became the sole emperor of the Roman Empire.

Later Rule

Foundation of Constantinople

Diocletian had chosen *Nicomedia* in the East as his capital during the Tetrarchy—not far from Byzantium, well situated to defend Thrace, Asia, and Egypt, all of which had required his military attention. Constantine had recognised the shift of the empire from the remote and depopulated West to the richer cities of the East, and the military strategic importance of protecting the Danube from barbarian excursions and Asia from a hostile Persia in choosing his new capital as well as being able to monitor shipping traffic between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Licinius' defeat came to represent the defeat of a rival centre of pagan and Greek-speaking political activity in the East, as opposed to the Christian and Latin-speaking Rome, and it was proposed that a new Eastern capital should represent the integration of the East into the Roman Empire as a whole, as a centre of learning, prosperity, and cultural preservation for the whole of the Eastern Roman Empire. Among the various locations proposed for this alternative capital, Constantine appears to have toyed earlier with Serdica (present-day Sofia), as he was reported saying that "*Serdica is my Rome*". Sirmium and Thessalonica were also considered. Eventually, however, Constantine decided to work on the Greek city of Byzantium, which offered the advantage of having already been extensively rebuilt on Roman patterns of urbanism during the preceding century by Septimius Severus and Caracalla, who had already acknowledged its strategic importance. The city was thus founded in 324, dedicated on 11 May 330 and renamed *Constantinopolis* ("Constantine's City" or Constantinople in English). Special commemorative coins were issued in 330 to honour the event. The new city was protected by the relics of the True Cross, the Rod of Moses and other holy relics, though a cameo now at the Hermitage Museum also represented Constantine crowned by the tyche of the new city. The figures of old gods were either replaced or assimilated into a framework of Christian symbolism. Generations later there was the story that a divine vision led Constantine to this spot, and an angel no one else could see led him on a circuit of the new walls. The capital would often be compared to the 'old' Rome as *Nova Roma Constantinopolitana*, the "New Rome of Constantinople".

New Rome

New Rome (Ancient Greek: Νέα Ῥώμη, *Néa Rhṓmē*; Koinē Greek: [ˈnɛ̝a ˈr̥ɔːmɛ̝ː]; Latin: *Nova Roma*; Late Latin: [ˈnɔwa ˈroma]) was the original name given by the Roman emperor Constantine the Great to his new imperial capital in 330 CE, which was built as an expansion of the city of Byzantium on the European coast of the Bosporus strait.

The city was founded as Byzantion (Ancient Greek: Βυζάντιον) by Megarian colonists in 657 BCE. It was renamed by Constantine the Great first as "New Rome" (*Nova Roma*) during the official dedication of the city as the new Roman capital in 330 CE, which he soon afterwards changed to Constantinople (*Constantinopolis*). The city was officially renamed as Istanbul in the 20th century, after the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923.

Constantine essentially rebuilt the city on a monumental scale from 326 to 330, partly modeling it after Rome. Names of this period included ἡ Νέα, δευτέρα Ῥώμη, "the New, second Rome"; Ἄλμα Ῥώμα, *"Alma Roma"*; Βυζαντιάς Ῥώμη, "Byzantine Rome"; ἑῴα Ῥώμη, "Eastern Rome"; and *Roma Constantinopolitana*.

The term "New Rome" was used to indicate that Byzantium, thereafter Constantinople, was the second/new capital of the Roman Empire. In modern times, "New Rome" remains part of the official title of the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch of that city.

During the Tetrarchy system established by Diocletian in the 3rd century, Nicomedia (modern İzmit) near Istanbul was the Eastern (and most senior) capital of the Roman Empire (Diocletian had his seat in Nicomedia as the Augustus of the East). The last Roman co-emperor in Nicomedia, Licinius, was defeated by Constantine at the Battle of Chrysopolis (in the modern Üsküdar district on the Asian side of Istanbul) on 18 September 324. Constantine used Nicomedia as his interim capital city between 324 and 330, while rebuilding and expanding Byzantium as *Nova Roma* (which he soon renamed again as *Constantinopolis*). Constantine died at a villa near Nicomedia on 22 May 337.

Religion and Religious Policy

Constantine was the first emperor to stop the persecution of Christians and to legalise Christianity, along with all other religions/cults in the Roman Empire. In February 313, he met with Licinius in Milan and developed the Edict of Milan, which stated that Christians should be allowed to follow their faith without oppression. This removed penalties for professing Christianity, under which many had been martyred previously, and it returned confiscated Church property. The edict protected all religions from persecution, not only Christianity, allowing anyone to worship any deity that they chose. A similar edict had been issued in 311 by Galerius, senior emperor of the Tetrarchy, which granted Christians the right to practise their religion but did not restore any property to them. The Edict of Milan included several clauses which stated that all confiscated churches would be returned, as well as other provisions for previously persecuted Christians. Some scholars think that Helena adopted Christianity as an adult, and according to Eusebius she was converted by Constantine, but other historians debate whether Constantine adopted his mother Helena's Christianity in his youth or whether he adopted it gradually over the course of his life.

Constantine possibly retained the title of *pontifex maximus* which emperors bore as heads of the ancient Roman religion until Gratian renounced the title. According to Christian writers, Constantine was over 40 years old when he finally declared himself a Christian, making it clear that he owed his successes only to the protection of the Christian God. Despite these declarations of being a Christian, he waited to be baptised until on his deathbed, believing that the baptism would release him of any sins he committed in the course of carrying out his policies while emperor. He supported the Church financially, built basilicas, granted privileges to clergy (such as exemption from certain taxes), promoted Christians to high office, and returned property confiscated during the long period of persecution. His most famous building projects include the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and Old St. Peter's Basilica. In constructing the Old St. Peter's Basilica, Constantine went to great lengths to erect the basilica on top of St. Peter's resting place, so much so that it even affected the design of the basilica, including the challenge of erecting it on the hill where St. Peter rested, making its complete construction time over 30 years from the date Constantine ordered it to be built.

Constantine might not have patronised Christianity alone. A triumphal arch was built in 315 to celebrate his victory in the Battle of the Milvian Bridge which was decorated with images of the goddess Victoria, and sacrifices were made to pagan gods at its dedication, including Apollo, Diana, and Hercules. Absent from the arch are any depictions of Christian symbolism. However, the arch was commissioned by the Senate, so the absence of Christian symbols may reflect the role of the Curia at the time as a pagan redoubt.

In 321, he legislated that the *venerable Sunday* should be a day of rest for all citizens. In 323, he issued a decree banning Christians from participating in state sacrifices. After the pagan gods had disappeared from his coinage, Christian symbols appeared as Constantine's attributes, the chi rho between his hands or on his labarum, as well on the coinage. The reign of Constantine established a precedent for the emperor to have great influence and authority in the early Christian councils, most notably the dispute over Arianism. Constantine disliked the risks to societal stability that religious disputes and controversies brought with them, preferring to establish an orthodoxy. His influence over the Church councils was to enforce doctrine, root out heresy, and uphold ecclesiastical unity; the Church's role was to determine proper worship, doctrines, and dogma.

North African bishops struggled with Christian bishops who had been ordained by Donatus in opposition to Caecilian from 313 to 316. The African bishops could not come to terms, and the Donatists asked Constantine to act as a judge in the dispute. Three regional Church councils and another trial before Constantine all ruled against Donatus and the Donatism movement in North Africa. In 317, Constantine issued an edict to confiscate Donatist church property and to send Donatist clergy into exile. More significantly, in 325 he summoned the First Council of Nicaea, most known for its dealing with Arianism and for instituting the Nicene Creed. He enforced the council's prohibition against celebrating the Lord's Supper on the day before the Jewish Passover, which marked a definite break of Christianity from the Judaic tradition. From then on, the solar Julian calendar was given precedence over the lunisolar Hebrew calendar among the Christian churches of the Roman Empire.

Constantine made some new laws regarding the Jews; some of them were unfavourable towards Jews, although they were not harsher than those of his predecessors. It was made illegal for Jews to seek converts or to attack other Jews who had converted to Christianity. They were forbidden to own Christian slaves or to circumcise their slaves. On the other hand, Jewish clergy were given the same exemptions as Christian clergy.

The religious policies of Constantine the Great have been called "ambiguous and elusive." Born in 273 during the Crisis of the Third Century (AD 235–284), Constantine the Great was thirty at the time of the Great Persecution. He saw his father become Augustus of the West and then shortly die. Constantine spent his life in the military warring with much of his extended family, and converted to Christianity sometime around 40 years of age. His religious policies, formed from these experiences, comprised increasing toleration of Christianity, limited regulations against Roman polytheism with toleration, participation in resolving religious disputes such as schism with the Donatists, and the calling of councils including the Council of Nicaea concerning Arianism. John Kaye characterizes the conversion of Constantine, and the Council of Nicea that Constantine called, as two of the most important things to ever happen to the Christian church.

Historical Background

Politics and Persecution in Constantine's early years

The Crisis of the Third Century (AD 235–284), was a period of heavy barbarian invasions and migrations into Roman territory. According to Peter Brown, imperial Rome's system of government was an easy–going system which governed indirectly through the regional, local elites, and was not built to survive the strain of continuous invasions and civil wars. During this period of crisis, life in a "beleaguered superpower" included bankruptcies, political fragmentation and military losses. Constantine was born during this period in AD 273 and was raised a polytheist by his polytheist parents.

The third century crisis had begun with the assassination of Emperor Severus Alexander by his own troops in 235 which led to a 50-year long leadership crisis with at least 26 claimants to the title of emperor. By 268, the empire had split into three competing states. The crisis didn't end until Diocletian took the reins and implemented reforms in 284. He restructured the Roman government by establishing the Tetrarchy, a system with four men ruling jointly over an empire divided into two parts, East and West. Each part was headed by an Augustus who had a subordinate Caesar. Diocletian ruled as head Augustus in the East, from AD 284–305, with Maximian as Augustus in the West, AD 286–305. Diocletian established administrative capitals located closer to the empire's borders for each of the four Tetrarchs. These changes helped restore imperial power by the end of the third century.

While the Tetrarchy itself didn't last long, Jonathan Bardill says that it made some permanent changes to the empire. Government became more centralized around the imperial court as the only certain source of power and influence, and elites lost some of their wealth and status. Capital cities emerged in each region while other cities shrank. The cities were no longer as unique and different as they had been. The empire could no longer be seen as "a commonwealth of cities." Instead, what all cities had in common was ideology: a shared loyalty to the emperor and his followers.

Brown says that the empire became more intrusive into the personal lives of its subjects as it also became more committed to an ideological stance.

This led to a suppression of Christianity that was more severe than any seen before and which took place on an empire-wide scale. On 24 February, AD 303, Diocletian issued the first of a series of edicts that rescinded Christians' legal rights and demanded compliance with traditional polytheistic religious practices. Christianity had existed for over 250 years; both the Church and the empire had changed in that time. The Church was no longer composed of tiny scattered groups. According to Peter Brown, it had become a 'universal church' that functioned as a "city within a city." There was a "Christian gentry" established in Asia Minor, and a developed hierarchy within the church, of leaders who were prominent in the Roman world of their day.

Persecution began with this leadership, forcing Christian bishops to participate in sacrifice to the traditional Roman gods or die. According to Norman H. Baynes, in the second year of the persecution, after the arrival of Urbanus as governor of Palestine, the imperial edict extending the order for sacrifice to the general public was then also published.

Known to Christians as the Great Persecution, Baynes says it had two phases. The first phase began with the issue of the First Edict in 303; the second phase began with the issue of the Fourth Edict, whose date and authorship are debated.[10]:189 David M. Potter says these edicts were enforced more in the East than in the West.

In addition to martyrdom, the First Edict also saw churches destroyed and demanded that the written scriptures and other Christian books be surrendered. At a time when the Emperor's law was seen as the divine source of order and peace, the Church claimed to possess its own universal divine law in the Christian scriptures, so the soldiers were sent out to confiscate and burn them. This is what scholars such as Maureen A. Tilley see as the cause of the Donatist schism. Donatists believed that every book of scripture was not just pen and ink, but was the physical manifestation of the Word of God, and that handing over the scriptures to be burnt, and handing over a martyr to die, were two sides of the same coin. Those who cooperated with the soldiers were, in the Latin, *traditores*, which originally referred to "handing over", but came to mean: traitors. Thereafter, Donatists refused to allow *traditores* back into church leadership positions. The Donatists would later become a thorn in Constantine's side which lasted throughout his reign.

In 305, Diocletian decided to resign and he compelled Maximian to retire as well. Galerius was Diocletian's son-in-law; both he and Constantius I, who was Constantine's father, had previously both been adopted by Diocletian. They were accordingly appointed Augustii of the East and West, respectively, on 1 May AD 305. Very soon after Diocletian stepped down, his successors began to struggle for control of the Roman Empire.

Familiar Disunity

Constantine and his father left Gaul and crossed into Britain to win a great battle over the Picts, but on 25 July 306, Constantine's father Constantius died in Eboracum (York). Afterwards, Constantine's father's troops proclaimed Constantine as Augustus in the West, and he agreed. However, Galerius didn't. Even though Constantine was the son of the Western Augustus Constantius, Diocletian had made a "rule" in 305 that sons should not follow their fathers in power. David Potter says stories circulating at the time said this was all part of the machinations of Galerius to prevent Constantine from becoming the senior emperor. The West at this time was still largely undeveloped. The military's support of Constantine forced Galerius as Augustus of the more developed and wealthier East, to recognize Constantine's claim, but only partially. Galerius appointed his own supporter Valerius Severus to the position of Augustus of the West, and proclaimed Constantine as Severus' subordinate Caesar.

Then, on 28 October 306, Maxentius, son of Maximian, declared himself Augustus of the West, holding Italy and living in Rome from AD 306–312. Maxentius summoned his father, Maximian, out of retirement for support. Maxentius was then declared a usurper, and Galerius ordered his co-Augustus, Severus, to dislodge Maxentius from Italy in early 307. Once Severus arrived in Italy, however, his army defected to Maxentius. Severus was captured and taken to the camp *Tres Tabernae* outside of Rome, where he either committed suicide, or was executed, in 307.

Galerius himself marched on Maxentius in Rome in the autumn of that year, but also failed to take the city. Constantine watched from Gaul and avoided conflict with both Maxentius and the Eastern emperors for most of this period. Constantine's holdings at this time were not much: mostly Britain, Gaul and Spain. Leithart says that, Constantine realized Galerius was an insecure foundation to build his future on, so Constantine made alliance with Maximian and Maxentius, sealing that alliance by marrying Maximian's daughter Fausta in the summer of AD 307.

In the spring of 308, Maximian attempted to depose his son, Maxentius, asking his former army to choose between father and son. They chose the son, and Maximian fled to his son-in-law Constantine.

Galerius nephew and Caesar was Maximinus II, also known as, Maximinus Daia. After Severus' death, Maximinus expected to be raised to Augustus in his place and was bitterly disappointed in 308 AD, when at the Conference of Carnuntum, Licinius was declared Augustus of the West instead. In 310 AD, a bitter and disappointed Maximinus II allowed his troops to proclaim him Augustus. That makes five men with serious claims to the same position of Augustus in the West. The empire was in full out civil war.

Two claimants to the position of Augustus died in 310: The first was Alexander of Carthage who had proclaimed himself emperor in AD 308. Maxentius sent his praetorian prefect Rufius Volusianus to deal with Alexander who was subsequently taken prisoner and executed by strangulation. The next to die was Maximian, Constantine's father-in-law. In 310, Constantine deployed his father-in-law on a mission to Arles where Maximian proceeded to announce that Constantine was dead; then he declared himself emperor. Response wasn't what he hoped, and he fled to Marseilles, but Constantine force-marched his army there, and Maximian was caught and allowed, or ordered, to commit suicide. Constantine then broke off his alliance with his brother-in-law Maxentius and joined with Licinius who was to marry Constantine's sister, Constantia.

Peter Leithart points out that Constantine spent his life in the military, often fighting other Romans, who also happened to be members of his extended family. By the time Constantine's life ended, "he was responsible for the death of his father-in-law Maximian, his brother-in-law Maxentius, his sister's husband Licinius and their son, Constantine's nephew, his wife Fausta and her and Constantine's son Crispus, and a few other relatives."

By 310, Galerius' health was failing and his power eroding. After his death in 311, the Balkan territories were quickly occupied by Licinius, while Maxentius obtained the populous and prosperous Asia Minor for himself to add to his holdings in Italy.

In the spring of 312, Constantine determined he needed to deal with Maxentius himself. Potter says scholars don't know who approached who, but Licinius and Constantine came to an agreement that appears to have involved mutual military support against Maxentius. While Licinius kept some of Maxentius' troops occupied in northern Italy, Constantine gathered an army of 40,000 soldiers and crossed the Alps heading toward Rome. According to Peter Leithart, Constantine met Maxentius' forces at Susa, Turin and Verona where he was victorious each time. According to T.Barnes, the praetorian prefect Ruricius Pompeianus, Maxentius' most senior general, was killed at Verona. "By October, Constantine was camped within sight of Rome, on the Tiber, near the Milvian Bridge."

Averil Cameron says Lactantius records that Constantine had a dream the night before battle where he was told to place the chi-rho (a symbol of Christ) on his soldiers' shields. Eusebius, however, makes no mention of such a vision. Eusebius compares the battle to the triumph of Moses over Pharaoh at the Rea Sea since Maxentius and his soldiers "sank as lead into the mighty waters" as the Book of Exodus says of Pharaoh. Bardill says the two armies met at the Saxa Rubra as Constantine approached the capitol from his camp. Maxentius' troops were forced back to the Tiber river where Maxentius had destroyed the bridge in hopes of trapping Constantine's troops. They would have been forced to cross the Tiber on the remaining pontoons, but it was Maxentius who was trapped instead. Maxentius drowned when the pontoons came apart.

According to Troels Myrup Kristensen, the day after the battle, Maxentius body was found and decapitated, and his head was paraded through the streets of Rome before being taken to Africa.

Conversion to Christianity

Nine years after Diocletian celebrated twenty years of stable rule with a smoking altar in the Roman Forum and the most severe persecution of Christians in the empire's history, the victorious Constantine I entered Rome and bypassed the altar on the capitol without offering sacrifice. According to Church historians writing after his death, Constantine had by then converted to Christianity, making him the first Christian Roman emperor. In his *Oration to the Assembly of the Saints* Constantine says he was not a child or a youth when he converted. Bardill says this is likely, as Constantine's parents were both polytheists; his mother was only persuaded to convert after Constantine had already done so. Bardill considers it likely Constantine converted some time between 310 and 315.

Brown calls Constantine's conversion a "very Roman conversion." "He had risen to power in a series of deathly civil wars, destroyed the system of divided empire, believed the Christian God had brought him victory, and therefore regarded that god as the proper recipient of *religio*. He did all of this without according *religio* to the traditional gods," and Brown says "this is how his subjects came to realize he was a Christian."

Brown says Constantine was over 40, had most likely been a traditional polytheist, and was a savvy and ruthless politician when he declared himself a Christian. His first step after conquering was to eclipse the memory of Maxentius, which he did by filling the center of Rome with monuments such as the Triumphal Arch and the Arch of Constantine. These monuments contain no reference to Christianity. However, in 312, Constantine ordered a statue of himself and Bardill quotes Eusebius as saying Constantine determined his statue should have "a trophy of the Savior's Passion to be set up beneath the hand of his own statue—indeed, he ordered them to place him in the most frequented spot in Rome, holding the saving sign in his right hand." Some time after 324, he wrote to the king of Persia, Shapur II: "Him I call upon with bended knee, shunning all abominable blood and hateful odors [of pagan sacrifice]."

Noel Lenski observes that the myth of Constantine being baptized by Pope Sylvester developed toward the end of the fifth century in a romantic depiction of Sylvester's life which has survived as the *Actus beati Sylvestri papai* (CPL 2235). Lenski says this story absolved the medieval church of a major embarrassment: Constantine's baptism by an Arian bishop, Eusebius of Nicomedia, which occurred while on campaign to Persia. According to Hans Pohlsander and Noel Lenski, Constantine swung through the Holy Land with the intent of being baptized in the Jordan river, but he became deathly ill at Nicomedia where he was swiftly baptized. He died shortly thereafter on 22 May 337 at a suburban villa named Achyron.

Francis Opoku writes that, "Whilst some are of the opinion that Constantine˝s conversion was genuine, others think that his policies to support Christians were for political expediency." As a converted Christian, why did he still have the unconquered sun —*Sol Invictus*— on his coins? Why was he never a properly instructed catechumen? Why was he not baptized until he was on his death bed? Constantine's initial grasp of Christianity was shallow, but as time went on Opoku says, it does seem as though he came to see himself as God's appointed sovereign, rewarded with divine favor. According to Opoku, "It thus appeared that Constantine gained, rather than lost, his willingness to exchange the style and title of a god for that of God's vice-regent."

Constantine's religious beliefs and policies

In Peter J. Leithart's view, Constantine was "a sincere if a somewhat simple believer." He ended the persecution of Christians, restored confiscated property to the churches, and adopted a policy toward non-Christians of toleration with limits. "He did not punish pagans for being pagans, or Jews for being Jews, and did not adopt a policy of forced conversion." Pagans remained in important positions at his court. He never engaged in a purge. Maxentius' supporters were not slaughtered when Constantine took the capital; Licinius' family and court were not killed. There were no pagan martyrs. Leithart says Constantine attributed his military success to God, and during his reign, the empire was relatively peaceful.

Following the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, Constantine and his co-Augustus Licinius issued the Edict of Milan which granted religious toleration. The Edict protected all faiths from religious persecution, and allowed anyone to worship whichever deity they chose. According to H. A. Drake, much has been written from differing views on Constantine's religious policies, but "Constantine's commitment to unity in the church [is] one policy on which virtually all parties agree." Conflicting views only arise when the topic shifts to whether or not this unity included pagans. Drake says that Jacob Burckhardt characterized Constantine as being "essentially unreligious", using the Church solely to support his power and ambition. However, Drake goes on to say that "critical reaction against Burckhardt's anachronistic reading has been decisive." Burckhardt used a method rooted in the Reformation by choosing politics to question Constantine's religious conviction. According to Drake, this doesn't give an accurate view because politics is in everything and religion isn't determined by it.

Constantine never directly outlawed paganism. In the words of an early edict, he decreed that polytheists could "celebrate the rites of an outmoded illusion," so long as they did not force Christians to join them. In addition, there are accounts that indicate Constantine remained somewhat tolerant of the pagans. His provisions in the earlier Edict of Milan were restated in the Edict of the Provincials. Drake points out that this edict called for peace and tolerance: "Let no one disturb another, let each man hold fast to that which his soil wishes…" Constantine never reversed this edict. Drake contemplates whether Constantine may have been trying to create a society where the two religions were syncretized. However, Constantine also "assails pagan temples as 'temples of falsehood'," and denounces paganism as idolatry and superstition in the same document. Constantine and his contemporary Christians did not treat paganism as a living religion; it was defined as a *superstitio*— an 'outmoded illusion.'

According to Burckhardt and his followers, being Christian automatically meant being intolerant; however, as Drake points out, that assumes a uniformity of belief within Christianity that does not exist in the historical record. Brown says that the church was never monolithic. In Drake's view, there are indications that Constantine did not convert to a belief in a church of a few pristine elect, but to a belief in Christianity as a "big tent" capable of containing different wings. Drake says the evidence indicates Constantine favored those who favored consensus, chose pragmatists over ideologues of any persuasion, and wanted peace and harmony "but also inclusiveness and flexibility." In his article "Constantine and Consensus", Drake concludes that Constantine's religious *policy* was aimed at including the Church in a broader policy of civic unity, even though his personal views undoubtedly favored one religion over the other.

Some of Constantine's choices have not left historians with a simple reading of his beliefs. Johann Peter Kirsch says the consensus of the sources is that Constantine had both his son and wife executed at his instigation. He also ordered the execution of eunuch priests in Egypt because they transgressed his moral norms. According to MacMullen, Constantine made many derogatory and contemptuous comments relating to the old religion; writing of the "true obstinacy" of the pagans, of their "misguided rites and ceremonial", and of their "temples of lying" contrasted with "the splendours of the home of truth".

Although Constantine is regarded as the first Christian emperor, this does not mean that there were no longer any pagans in the empire. Christians most likely formed between sixteen and seventeen percent of empire at the time of Constantine's conversion. They did not have the numerical advantage to form a sufficient power–base to begin a systematic persecution of pagans. However, Brown reminds us "We should not underestimate the fierce mood of the Christians of the fourth century:" repression, persecution and martyrdom do not generally breed tolerance of those same persecutors. Brown says Roman authorities had shown no hesitation in "taking out" the Christian church that they saw as a threat to empire, and that Constantine and his successors did the same for the same reasons. Constantine would sporadically prohibit public sacrifice and close pagan temples; very little pressure, however, was put on individual pagans. Just as persecution of Christians had been sporadic, actions against pagans were also sporadic.

Lives were lost around the imperial court for various reasons and intrigues, but there is no evidence of judicial killings for illegal sacrifices before Tiberius Constantine (574-582). Drake and Hans-Ulrich Wiemer are two among many who agree that Constantine was generally not in favor of suppression of paganism by force. Instead, Constantine took steps to legally limit the public practice of pagan worship. Constantine's main approach was to use enticement by making the adoption of Christianity beneficial.

On Sunday 8 November 324, Constantine consecrated Byzantium as his new residence, Constantinoupolis — "city of Constantine" — with the local pagan priests, astrologers, and augurs. However, the emperor still went back to Rome to celebrate his Vicennalia: his twenty-year jubilee. Two years after the consecration of Constantinople, Constantine left Rome behind, returning to Constantinople permanently. On Monday 4 November 328, new rituals to dedicate the city as the new *capital* of the Roman empire were performed. Among the attendants were the Neoplatonist philosopher Sopater and pontifex maximus Praetextus. In commemoration, Constantine had a statue of the goddess of fortune Tyche built, and a column made of porphyry, where he placed a golden statue of Apollo with the face of Constantine looking toward the sun. Litehart says "Constantinople was newly founded, but it deliberately evoked the Roman past religiously as well as politically." On 11 May 330, the dedication of the city was celebrated with the festival of Saint Mocius and the striking of commemorative medallions and coins. Up until 325, Constantine had "continued to pay his public honors to the Sun" on coins that showed him jointly with *Sol Invictus*, whereas these later coins showed the labarum instead.

Although by this time Constantine openly supported Christianity, the city still offered room to pagan cults: there were shrines for the Dioscuri and Tyche. Hans-Ulrich Wiemer says there is good reason to believe the ancestral temples of Helios, Artemis and Aphrodite remained functioning in Constantinople as well. The Acropolis, with its ancient pagan temples, was left as it was.

Several scholars indicate that in the new capital city of Constantinople, Constantine made sure there were no new pagan temples built and refused to allow blood sacrifice. However, according to French historian Gilbert Dagron, Constantine's reign did not constitute the end of temple construction altogether. He both permitted and commissioned temple construction in areas outside Constantinople. Trombley says the dedication of new temples is attested in the historical and archaeological records until the end of the 4th century.

Constantine pillaged many pagan sanctuaries, but according to Hans-Ulrich Wiemer, that pillaging was motivated more by a desire to supply his new capital with "imposing statuary" than it was by a desire to destroy paganism. Noel Lenski also says Constantinople was "literally crammed with statuary gathered, in Jerome's words, by 'the virtual denuding' of every city in the East." According to Ramsay MacMullen, Constantine did this as an act of anti-paganism. However, Wiemer says that Libanius, the contemporary chronicler of Constantine, writes in a passage from his *In Defense of the Temples,* that Constantine looted the Temples in order to get their treasures to build Constantinople, not because of anti-paganism.

According to Wiemer, Constantine destroyed some pagan sanctuaries, including the prestigious Asclepias at Cilician Aegeae. Constantine is also said to have destroyed the Temple of Aphrodite in Lebanon. He did 'confiscate' the military colony of Aelia Capitolina (Jerusalem), destroying a temple there for the purpose of constructing a church. Christian historians had alleged that Hadrian (2nd century) had constructed a temple of Aphrodite on the site of the crucifixion on Golgotha hill in order to suppress Jewish-Christian veneration there. Constantine used that to justify the temple's destruction, saying he was simply 'reclaiming' the property.

Using the same vocabulary of reclamation, Constantine acquired several more sites of Christian significance in the Holy Land for the purpose of constructing churches. At the sacred oak and spring at Mambre, a site venerated and occupied by both Jews and pagans alike, written sources say that Constantine ordered the burning of the idols, the destruction of the altar, and erection of a church. The archaeology of the site, however, demonstrates that Constantine's church along with its attendant buildings, only occupied a peripheral sector of the precinct, leaving the rest unhindered.

Most of these sites had been "polluted" by pagan shrines and needed "desacrilization" or deconsecration before they could be used. (The practice of "cleansing" a sacred site of its previous spiritual influences was not limited to Christians.) According to Bayliss, the historical writings of Prudentius indicate the deconsecration of a temple merely required the removal of the cult statue and altar. However, this was often extended to the removal or even destruction of other statues and icons, votive stelae and all other internal imagery and decoration. Such objects were not always destroyed, some were *desacralized* or "cleansed" by having crosses chiseled onto them and perhaps a rite performed over them. Some were simply relocated and displayed as works of art. For example, the Parthenon frieze was preserved after the Christian conversion of the temple, although in modified form.

Constantine and his successors brought wealth, peace, and the opportunity to build a strong local position, to the churches. Christianity had already shown itself as able to distribute money in support of its religious causes; following the Roman tradition of endowments, Constantine became a donor of over-powering generosity. After 320, Constantine supported the Christian church with his patronage, built basilicas, and endowed the church with land and other wealth. He set up St.Peter's in Rome and San Giovanni in Laterano; in Antioch, he built a large golden domed octagon and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

The construction of the *Church of the Holy Sepulcher,* and other churches built by Constantine after his mother the empress Helena undertook a trip to Palestine (326–328 AD), were only the beginning. By the end of the Byzantine period (235/325 - 614 AD), Mark A. Meyers writes that approximately 400 churches and chapels, along with over a hundred new synagogues, had been built in Palestine and Jordan.

Under Constantine, most of the temples remained open for the official pagan ceremonies and for the more socially acceptable activities of 'libation' and the offering of incense. Church restrictions opposing the pillaging of pagan temples by Christians were in place even while the Christians were being persecuted by the pagans. Despite the polemic of Eusebius, Constantine's principal contribution to the downfall of the temples lay primarily in his neglect of them.

Scott Bradbury writes that Constantine's policies toward pagans are "ambiguous and elusive" and that "no aspect has been more controversial than the claim he banned blood sacrifices." Sources on this are contradictory: Eusebius says he did; Labanius says it was Constantius II who did so and not Constantine I. According to R. Malcolm Errington, in Book 2 of Eusebius' *De vita Constantini*, chapter 44, Eusebius explicitly states that Constantine wrote a new law "appointing mainly Christian governors and also a law forbidding any remaining pagan officials from sacrificing in their official capacity."

Other significant evidence fails to support Eusebius' claim of an end to sacrifice. Constantine, in his *Letter to the Eastern Provincials*, never mentions any law against sacrifices. Errington says it is generally seen that the *Letter's* purpose "is to flatter and praise the Christians, to show the personal commitment of the emperor to their cause, while at the same time preventing a crusade against the unbelieving." Archaeologist Luke Lavan writes that blood sacrifice was already declining in popularity, just as construction of new temples was also declining, but that this seems to have little to do with anti-paganism. Drake says Constantine personally abhorred sacrifice and removed the obligation to participate in them from the list of duties for imperial officials, but evidence of an actual sweeping ban on sacrifice is slight, while evidence of its continued practice is great.

Michelle Salzman says that, in the fourth century, there was a conceptual connection between *superstito* as illicit divination or magic and fear of the divine. Laws against the private practice of divination had been enacted in the early imperial period of AD 1-30 before the time of the emperor Tiberius. Luke Lavan explains, private practices were associated with treason and secret plots against the emperor. The fear of a rival, had led many emperors to be severe against those who attempted to divine their successor. Maijastina Kahlos says that Christian emperors inherited this fear of private practices, including the fear of private divination. Emperors had long thought to keep knowledge of the future for themselves, therefore private divination, astrology, and 'Chaldean practices' became associated with magic and carried the threat of banishment and execution long before Constantine.

From emperor to emperor, private and secret rituals were constantly at risk of falling into the category of magic. However, Constantine's decree against private divination did not classify divination as magic, therefore, Constantine allowed the haruspices to practice their rituals in public. According to Kahlos, he still labeled it "superstitio."

After the Diocletianic persecution, many of those who had cooperated with the authorities wanted to return to their positions in the church. Maureen Tilley, President of the North American Patristics Society, says the different responses to this 'returning' among the North African Christians were already becoming apparent by AD 305.

According to Tilley, many of the North African Christians had a long established tradition of a "physicalist approach to religion." The sacred scriptures were not simply books to them, but were the Word of God in physical form; they saw handing over the Bible, and handing over a person to be martyred, as "two sides of the same coin." During the Great Persecution, "When Roman soldiers came calling, some of the [Catholic] officials handed over the sacred books, vessels, and other church goods rather than risk legal penalties" over a few objects. These cooperators became known as *traditores;* the term originally meant *one who hands over a physical object*, but it came to mean "traitor". The North African Christians who were the rigorists known as Donatists, continued to resent Roman government, and refused to accept the *traditores* back into church leadership positions, citing the need for ecclesiastical purity. This rejection extended to the traditores' descendants as well.

Catholics wanted to wipe the slate clean and accommodate the new government. There were also different views of baptism and some other practices, but Alan Cameron says Donatism was not an actual heresy with differences in important doctrine, instead, it was a schism over differences in practices.

In 311, the bishop of Carthage, Mensurius, died. The twelve bishops of the region were supposed to gather and elect a successor, but instead, the Donatists and the Catholics, each elected one of their own, and neither would accept the other's nominee. The rigorists elected Majorinus who was succeeded by Donatus, giving the movement its name.

The Donatists appealed to Constantine to decide who would be the real bishop of Carthage. Christians expected Constantine to be the arbiter of all religious disputes. It was simply part of the emperor's job. Harold A. Drake says that, "since the Jovian dynasty when Diocletian established the empire as one expressly based on divine support, the lack of consensus on religious matters was no small thing." Constantine had already appointed a council at Rome under Pope Miltiades in 313 to deal with the issue of Donatism, and in 314, he also appointed an appeals commission that met at Arles to sort out who should be the rightful bishop. The commission found in favor of the Catholic bishop. The Donatists rejected the commission's findings and refused compromise.

Therefore, Tilley says, "it became Constantine's imperial and religious duty" to impose acceptance. Constantine responded with moderate to severe repression. The first Donatist' martyr stories come from the years 317 to 321. Tilley indicates this was a response of the state to the need for public order and was also a specifically Roman response from the emperor's need to keep the pax deorum (‘the benevolence of gods’) – the peace between Heaven and earth.

Sociologist Joseph Bryant sees the Donatist controversy as the culmination of the dynamic process of a sect changing into a church. Bryant asserts that Christianity changed from being a "marginal, persecuted, and popularly despised ... sect" in the first century, to a fully institutionalized church capable of embracing the entire Roman empire, by the third century. He explains that, "The governing principle of the sectarian pattern of association is not in the institutional apparatus, but in the personal holiness of its members". A church, on the other hand, is an organization where sanctity is found in the institution rather than the individual. To become a church, Bryant says "Christianity had to overcame its alienation from the 'world' and successfully weather persecution, accept that it was no longer an *ecclesia pura*, (a sect of the holy and the elect), but was instead a *corpus permixtum*, a 'catholic' Church geared to mass conversions and institutionally endowed with extensive powers of sacramental grace and redemption".

Without what Peter Brown has called "the conversion of Christianity" to the culture and ideals of the Roman world", Brown says Constantine would never have converted, but this "momentous transformation" also threatened the survival of the marginal religious movement as it naturally led to divisions, schisms and defections. Bryant explains that, "once those within a sect determine that the 'spirit' no longer resides in the parent body, 'the holy and the pure' typically find themselves compelled – either by conviction or coercion – to withdraw and establish their own counter-church, comprised of the 'gathered remnant' of God's elect".

Since Constantine had commissioned more than one investigation into the Donatist issues, and because they had all ruled in support of the Catholic cause, yet the Donatists refused to submit to either imperial or ecclesiastical authority, that would have been sufficient cause to act. Constantine became the first Emperor in the Christian era to persecute specific groups of Christians. Brown says Roman authorities had shown no hesitation in "taking out" the Christian church they saw as a threat to empire, and Constantine and his successors did the same, for the same reasons.

Constantine's persecution of these Christians was no more successful than Diocletian's had been, and in 321, Constantine acknowledged failure and cancelled the laws against the Donatists. For the next 75 years, both parties existed, often directly alongside each other, with a double line of bishops for the same cities. This eventually led to a second phase of persecution, but the Donatists survived until Arab armies overran North African in the closing years of the seventh century.

John Kaye characterizes the conversion of Constantine, and the council of Nicea that Constantine called, as two of the most important things to ever happen to the Christian church. Throughout his reign, Constantine's involvement with the church was dominated by its many conflicts defining orthodoxy versus heterodoxy and heresy. Michele R. Salzman indicates heresy was a higher priority than pagans for most Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries including Constantine.

The worst of these heresies was the 56-year long Arian controversy with its debate of Trinitarian formulas. Donatism was a 'schism' (differences were over practices not doctrine) that was geographically limited to northern Africa; Arianism, on the other hand, was seen as an actual heresy: wrong belief. Arians believed the Father, Son and Holy Ghost were not equals. Most fourth and fifth century church controversies centered on the nature of Christ and his exact relation to God and man. Unlike Donatism, Arianism was spread throughout much of the empire, including among Germanic tribes, like the Visigoths, who were just converting.

While it is generally accepted that Arianism began in 318, William Telfer writes that dating its beginning is highly problematic. Kaye says it started in Alexandria, between the bishops Arius and Alexander, and quickly spread through Egypt and Libya and the other Roman provinces. Bishops engaged in "wordy warfare," and the people divided into parties, while the pagans ridiculed them all. At the center of the controversy was Athanasius who became the "champion of orthodoxy" in Alexander's place.

Constantine got news of the conflict sometime before his last war with Licinius, and was deeply distressed by it. After fruitless letter writing and the sending of other bishops to promote reconciliation, Constantine called for all church leaders to convene in 325 in Nicea in Bithynia (in present-day Turkey) to settle the issue. Constantine presided at the council. Kaye references Sozomen as saying Constantine opened with a speech in which he exhorted the bishops as friends and ministers to resolve conflict and embrace peace. Sozomen says the bishops accordingly broke out in mutual accusation. Constantine mediated, occasionally severely corrected, persuaded and praised, and eventually brought them to agreement. The result was the Nicene Creed, from which five bishops abstained. They were banished for a time, then eventually returned. Athanasius was then ousted from his bishopric in Alexandria in 336 by the Arians, forced into exile, and lived much of the remainder of his life in a cycle of forced movement as power went back and forth between the two groups.

The controversy became political after Constantine's death. Athanasius died in 373, but his orthodox teaching was a major influence in the West, and on Theodosius, who became ruler in 381. The Nicene creed remained the official creed of the church.

Constantinian Shift

The Constantinian shift was, according to some theologians and historians of antiquity, a set of political and theological changes that took place during the 4th-century under the leadership of Emperor Constantine the Great. Rodney Clapp claims that the shift or change started in the year 200. The term was popularized by the Mennonite theologian John H. Yoder. He claims that the change was not just freedom from persecution but an alliance between the State and the Church that led to a kind of Caesaropapism. The claim that there ever was a Constantinian shift has been disputed; Peter Leithart argues that there was a "brief, ambiguous 'Constantinian moment' in the fourth century", but that there was "no permanent, epochal 'Constantinian shift'".

The Shift

Constantine the Great (reigned 306–337) adopted Christianity as his system of belief after his victory at the Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312. The following year, 313, he issued the Edict of Milan with his eastern colleague, Licinius. The edict legalised Christianity alongside other religions in the Roman Empire. In 325 the First Council of Nicaea signalled consolidation of Christianity under an orthodoxy endorsed by Constantine. While this did not make other Christian groups outside the adopted definition illegal, dissenting Arian bishops were initially exiled. But Constantine reinstated Arius just before the heresiarch died in 336 and exiled the Orthodox Athanasius of Alexandria from 335 to 337. In 380 Emperor Theodosius I made Christianity the Roman Empire's official religion (see State church of the Roman Empire). In 392 Theodosius passed legislation prohibiting all pagan cultic worship.

During the 4th century, however, there was no real unity between church and state: in the course of the Arian controversy, Arian or semi-Arian emperors exiled leading Trinitarian bishops, such as Athanasius (335, 339, 356, 362, 365), Hilary of Poitiers (356), and Gregory of Nyssa (374); just as leading Arian and Anomoean theologians such as Aëtius (fl. 350) also suffered exile.

Towards the end of the century, Bishop Ambrose of Milan made the powerful Emperor Theodosius I (reigned 379–395) do penance for several months after the massacre of Thessalonica (390) before admitting him again to the Eucharist. On the other hand, only a few years later, Chrysostom, who as bishop of Constantinople criticized the excesses of the royal court, was eventually banished (403) and died (407) while traveling to his place of exile.

Theological Implications

Critics of state-aligned Christianity often point to the ascension of Constantine as the beginning of Caesaropapism: according to this critique, the official Christianity of the Roman state rapidly became a religious and metaphysical justification for the existence, exercise, and expansion of worldly political power, ultimately facilitating earthly Christian empire both for Rome and its successors across Christendom. Similar criticisms are levied by Christian anarchists, who claim that the Constantinian shift triggered the Great Apostasy by transforming the religion into a means for preserving the ruling elite's power and justifying violence.

Augustine of Hippo, who originally had rejected violence in religious matters, later justified it theologically against those he considered heretics, such as the Donatists, who themselves violently harassed their opponents. Before him, Athanasius believed that violence was justified in weeding out heresies that could damn all future Christians. He felt that any means was justified in repressing Arian belief. In 385, Priscillian, a bishop in Spain, was the first Christian to be executed for heresy, though the most prominent church leaders rejected this verdict.

Theologians critical of the Constantinian shift also see it as the point at which membership in the Christian church became associated with a social concept of citizenship, rather than reflecting one's internal decisions and feelings. American theologian Stanley Hauerwas notes the shift as forming part of the foundation for the contemporary American conception of Christianity, one that is closely associated with patriotism and civil religion.

Constantine the Great and Christianity

During the reign of the Roman emperor Constantine the Great (306–337 AD), Christianity began to transition to the dominant religion of the Roman Empire. Historians remain uncertain about Constantine's reasons for favoring Christianity, and theologians and historians have often argued about which form of early Christianity he subscribed to. There is no consensus among scholars as to whether he adopted his mother Helena's Christianity in his youth, or, as claimed by Eusebius of Caesarea, encouraged her to convert to the faith he had adopted.

Constantine ruled the Roman Empire as sole emperor for much of his reign. Some scholars allege that his main objective was to gain unanimous approval and submission to his authority from all classes, and therefore he chose Christianity to conduct his political propaganda, believing that it was the most appropriate religion that could fit with the imperial cult. Regardless, under the Constantinian dynasty Christianity expanded throughout the empire, launching the era of the state church of the Roman Empire. Whether Constantine sincerely converted to Christianity or remained loyal to paganism is a matter of debate among historians. His formal conversion in 312 is almost universally acknowledged among historians, despite that it was claimed he was baptized only on his deathbed by the Arian bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia in 337; the real reasons behind it remain unknown and are debated also. According to Hans Pohlsander, professor emeritus of history at the State University of New York at Albany, Constantine's conversion was a matter of realpolitik, meant to serve his political interest in keeping the empire united under his control:

> *The prevailing spirit of Constantine's government was one of conservatism. His conversion to and support of Christianity produced fewer innovations than one might have expected; indeed they served an entirely conservative end, the preservation and continuation of the Empire.*
> **—Hans Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine***

Constantine's decision to cease the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire was a turning point for early Christianity, sometimes referred to as the Triumph of the Church, the Peace of the Church or the Constantinian shift. In 313, Constantine and Licinius issued the Edict of Milan decriminalizing Christian worship. The emperor became a great patron of the Church and set a precedent for the position of the Christian emperor within the Church and raised the notions of orthodoxy, Christendom, ecumenical councils, and the state church of the Roman Empire declared by edict in 380. He is revered as a saint and isapostolos in the Eastern Orthodox Church, Oriental Orthodox Church, and various Eastern Catholic Churches for his example as a Christian monarch.

Before Constantine

The first recorded official persecution of Christians on behalf of the Roman Empire was in AD 64, when, as reported by the Roman historian Tacitus, Emperor Nero attempted to blame Christians for the Great Fire of Rome. According to Church tradition, it was during the reign of Nero that Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome. However, modern historians debate whether the Roman government distinguished between Christians and Jews prior to Nerva's modification of the *Fiscus Judaicus* in 96, from which point practising Jews paid the tax and Christians did not.

Christians suffered from sporadic and localized persecutions over a period of two and a half centuries. Their refusal to participate in the imperial cult was considered an act of treason and was thus punishable by execution. The most widespread official persecution was carried out by Diocletian beginning in 303. During the Great Persecution, the emperor ordered Christian buildings and the homes of Christians torn down and their sacred books collected and burned. Christians were arrested, tortured, mutilated, burned, starved, and condemned to gladiatorial contests to amuse spectators. The Great Persecution officially ended in April 311, when Galerius, senior emperor of the Tetrarchy, issued an edict of toleration which granted Christians the right to practice their religion, although it did not restore any property to them. Constantine, caesar in the Western Empire, and Licinius, caesar in the East, also were signatories to the edict. It has been speculated that Galerius' reversal of his long-standing policy of Christian persecution has been attributable to one or both of these co-caesars.

Constantine’s Conversion

It is possible that Constantine's mother, Helena, exposed him to Christianity. In any case, he only declared himself a Christian after issuing the Edict of Milan. Writing to Christians, Constantine made clear that he believed that he owed his successes to the protection of the High God alone.

Vision of Apollo

In 310 a panegyric, preserved in the *Panegyrici Latini* collection and delivered at Trier for the joint occasion of the city's birthday and Constantine's quinquennalia, recounted a vision apparently seen by the emperor while journeying between Marseille and Trier. The panegyricist recounts that the god Apollo appeared to Constantine in company with Victoria and together presented him with three wreaths representing thirty years of power. This vision was perhaps in a dream experienced by the emperor while practising incubation at the shrine of Apollo Grannus in Grand, Vosges. Eusebius was aware of this vision, or reports of it, and refers in his own *Panegyric of Constantine* of 336 to "tricennial crowns" bestowed by the hand of God in Christianity on Constantine, "augmenting the sway of his kingdom by long years".

Battle of the Milvian Bridge

Eusebius of Caesarea and other Christian sources record that Constantine experienced a dramatic series of events sometime between his father Constantius Chlorus's death in 306 and the Battle of the Milvian Bridge on 28 October 312. The battle secured Constantine's claim to the title of *augustus* in the West, which he had assumed unilaterally when his father died. According to the Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*, Constantine saw a vision of "a cross-shaped trophy formed from light" above the sun at midday.

> *About the time of the midday sun, when the day was just turning, he said he saw with his own eyes up in the sky and resting over the sun, a cross-shaped trophy formed from light, and a text attached to it which said, "By this conquer." (τούτῳ νίκα) Amazement at the spectacle seized both him and the whole company of soldiers which was then accompanying him on a campaign he was conducting somewhere, and witnessed the miracle.*
> **—Eusebius of Caesarea, *Vita Constantini*, 1.28.2**

The Greek words *Ἐν Τούτῳ Νίκα* 'in this sign, conquer' are often rendered in Latin as *in hoc signo vinces* 'in this sign, you will conquer'. According to Eusebius, Constantine also had a dream that same night. In the dream,

> *the Christ of God appeared to him with the sign which had appeared in the sky, and urged him to make himself a copy of the sign which had appeared in the sky, and to use this as a protection against the attacks of the enemy.*
> **—Eusebius of Caesarea, *Vita Constantini*, 1.29**

Writing his *Church History* shortly after 313, Eusebius makes no mention of this story in that work and does not recount it until composing his posthumous biography of Constantine decades afterwards. *Life of Constantine* was written by Eusebius after Constantine had died, and Eusebius admitted that he had heard the story from Constantine long after it had happened. Lactantius, writing 313–315 and around twenty years before Eusebius's *Life*, also does not mention a vision in the sky. Instead, Lactantius mentions only that Constantine's dream took place on the eve of the climactic battle on the Ponte Milvio across the Tiber, with the crucial detail that the "sign" was marked on the Constantinian soldiers' shields. According to Lactantius:

> *Constantine was advised in a dream to mark the heavenly sign of God on the shields of his soldiers and then engage in battle. He did as he was commanded and by means of a letter X turned sideways, with the top of its head bent around (transversa X littera, summo capite circumflexo), he marked Christ on their shields (Christum in scutis notat). Armed with this sign, the army took up its weapons.*
> **—Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, 44.5–6**

It is unclear from these sources what Constantine saw and what was marked on his army's shields. Eusebius's description of the daytime vision suggests a cross-shaped (either T or †) symbol, whereas Lactantius's description suggests a staurogram (⳨), although the *crux ansata* (☥) or the Egyptian ankh (☥) have been proposed as interpretations as well. All of these symbols were used by Christians in the 3rd and 4th centuries. Eusebius concurs with Lactantius that a new device was added to Constantine's soldiers' shields but does not connect this with the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, saying only that the "sign of the saving trophy" was marked, but not specifying when. Sometime after 317, Eusebius was permitted by Constantine, probably either in 325 or in 335, to see a standard that was made according to the emperor's dreamt instructions during the civil war. He described it as:

> *A tall pole plated with gold had a transverse bar forming the shape of a cross. Up at the extreme top a wreath woven of precious stones and gold had been fastened. On it two letters, imitating by its first characters the name "Christ," formed the monogram of the Saviour's title, rho being intersected in the middle by chi ... From the transverse bar, which was bisected by the pole, hung suspended a cloth ... But the upright pole ... carried the golden head-and-shoulders portrait of the Godbeloved Emperor, and likewise of his sons.*
> **—Eusebius of Caesarea, *Vita Constantini*, 1.31.1–2**

This later description of Eusebius's, written after 324, suggests a more elaborate symbol than does Lactantius's earlier text, involving the Greek letters *rho* (P) and *chi* (X) ligatured as the c*hi rho* (☧), a monogram of Ancient Greek: χριστός, romanized: *khrīstós*, lit. 'anointed', referring to Jesus. Possibly Eusebius's description refers to a *chi-rho* inside the loop of an *ankh*.

Following the battle and the defeat and death of Maxentius, Constantine became the undisputed emperor in the West and performed an *adventus*, a ceremonial entrance to the city. Arriving inside Rome's walls he ignored the altars to the gods prepared on the Capitoline Hill and did not carry out the customary sacrifices to celebrate a general's victorious entry into Rome, instead heading directly to the imperial palace. This is probably because the traditional Roman triumph, concluding with the sacrifice to Jupiter *Optimus Maximus* at his temple on the Capitoline, was traditionally celebrated after victory over Rome's enemies, rather than after the conquest of the city by a claimant in a civil war. The Arch of Constantine, for which numerous reliefs from earlier monuments depicting prior emperors sacrificing to various gods were re-carved with the face of Constantine, does not have an image of Constantine sacrificing to Jupiter, although he is shown sacrificing to Apollo and to Hercules.

Edict of Milan

In 313 Constantine and Licinius announced "that it was proper that the Christians and all others should have liberty to follow that mode of religion which to each of them appeared best," thereby granting tolerance to all religions, including Christianity. The Edict of Milan went a step further than the earlier Edict of Serdica by Galerius in 311, returning confiscated Church property. This edict made the empire officially neutral with regard to religious worship; it neither made the traditional religions illegal nor made Christianity the state religion, as occurred later with the Edict of Thessalonica of 380. The Edict of Milan did, however, raise the stock of Christianity within the empire and reaffirmed the importance of religious worship to the welfare of the state. Most influential people in the empire, especially high military officials, had not been converted to Christianity and still participated in traditional Roman religion; Constantine's rule exhibited at least a willingness to appease these factions. Coins minted up to eight years after the battle still bore the images of Roman gods. The monuments he first commissioned, such as the Arch of Constantine, contained no reference to Christianity.

Patronage of the Church

The accession of Constantine was a turning point for early Christianity. After his victory, Constantine took over the role of patron of the Christian faith. He supported the Church financially, had a number of basilicas built, granted privileges (e.g., exemption from certain taxes) to clergy, promoted Christians to high-ranking offices, returned property confiscated during the Great Persecution of Diocletian, and endowed the church with land and other wealth. Between 324 and 330, Constantine built a new city, New Rome, at Byzantium on the Bosporos, which would be named Constantinople for him. Unlike "old" Rome, the city began to employ overtly Christian architecture, contained churches within the city walls, and had no pre-existing temples from other religions.

In doing this, however, Constantine required those who had not converted to Christianity to pay for the new city. Christian chroniclers tell that it appeared necessary to Constantine "to teach his subjects to give up their rites ... and to accustom them to despise their temples and the images contained therein," This led to the closure of temples because of a lack of support, their wealth flowing to the imperial treasure; Constantine did not need to use force to implement this. It was the chronicler Theophanes who added centuries later that temples "were annihilated", but this was considered "not true" by contemporary historians.

Constantine respected cultivated persons, and his court was composed of older, respected, and honored men. Men from leading Roman families who declined to convert to Christianity were denied positions of power yet still received appointments; even up to the end of his life, two-thirds of his top government were non-Christian. Constantine's laws enforced and reflected his Christian attitudes. Crucifixion was abolished for reasons of Christian piety but was replaced with hanging, to demonstrate the preservation of Roman supremacy. On March 7, 321, Sunday, which was sacred to Christians as the day of Christ's resurrection and to the Roman Sun God Sol Invictus, was declared an official day of rest. On that day markets were banned and public offices were closed, except for the purpose of freeing slaves. There were, however, no restrictions on performing farming work on Sundays, which was the work of the great majority of the population.

Some laws made during his reign were even humane in the modern sense and supported tolerance, possibly inspired by his Christianity: a prisoner was no longer to be kept in total darkness but must be given the outdoors and daylight; a condemned man was allowed to die in the arena, but he could not be branded on his "heavenly beautified" face, since God was supposed to have made man in his image, but only on the feet. Publicly displayed gladiatorial games were ordered to be eliminated in 325.

Early Christian Bibles

According to Eusebius, in 331 Constantine had commissioned him to deliver fifty volumes of scriptures for the churches of Constantinople, which were to be bound in leather and easily portable. Only three or four churches are known certainly to have existed in Constantine's reign, but others appear to have been planned or established, for which the scriptures were commissioned. The volumes were likely gospel books containing the Canonical Gospels of the Four Evangelists rather than complete Bibles with the entire Biblical canon, which were very rare in antiquity.

Athanasius (*Apol. Const. 4*) recorded around 340 Alexandrian scribes preparing Bibles for Constans. Little else is known. It has been speculated that this may have provided motivation for canon lists, and that Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus are examples of these Bibles. Together with the Peshitta and Codex Alexandrinus, these are the earliest extant Christian Bibles.

Fifty Bibles of Constantine

The Fifty Bibles of Constantine are said to have been Bibles in the Greek language commissioned in 331 by Constantine I and prepared by Eusebius of Caesarea. They were made for the use of the Bishop of Constantinople in the growing number of churches in that very new city. Eusebius quoted the letter of commission in his *Life of Constantine*, and it is the only surviving source which attests the existence of the Bibles.

It is speculated that this commission may have provided motivation for the development of the canon lists and that Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus are possible surviving examples of these Bibles. There is no evidence among the records of the First Council of Nicaea of any determination on the canon; however, Jerome, in his *Prologue to Judith*, makes the claim that the Book of Judith was "found by the Nicene Council to have been counted among the number of the Sacred Scriptures".

According to Eusebius, Constantine I wrote him in his letter:

> *I have thought it expedient to instruct your Prudence to order fifty copies of the sacred Scriptures, the provision and use of which you know to be most needful for the instruction of the Church, to be written on prepared parchment in a legible manner, and in a convenient, portable form, by professional transcribers thoroughly practised in their art.*

About accomplishing the Emperor's demand:

> *Such were the emperor's commands, which were followed by the immediate execution of the work itself, which we sent him in magnificent and elaborately bound volumes of a threefold and fourfold form.*

This is the usual way in which Eusebius' text is translated, but there are more possibilities, because the phrase "ἐν πολυτελῶς ἠσκημένοις τεύχεσιν τρισσὰ καὶ τετρασσὰ διαπεμψάντων ἡμῶν" has many potential meanings:

1. Three or four codices were prepared at a time – Kirsopp Lake and Bernard de Montfaucon;
2. Codices were sent in three or four boxes – F. A. Heinichen;
3. Codices were prepared in with three or four folios – Scrivener;
4. Text of the codices was written in three or four columns per page – Tischendorf, Gebhardt, and Gregory, Kirsopp Lake;
5. Codices were sent by threes or fours.
6. Some codices contained three gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) but others included four gospels (including John) - Eduard Schwartz.

Athanasius of Alexandria referred to another request of producing Bible manuscripts: "I sent to him volumes containing the holy Scriptures, which he had ordered me to prepare for him." Athanasius could have received this request between 337 and 339.

Constantin von Tischendorf, discoverer of Codex Sinaiticus, believed that Sinaiticus and Vaticanus were among these fifty Bibles prepared by Eusebius in Caesarea. According to him, they were written with three (as Vaticanus) or four columns per page (as Sinaiticus). Tischendorf's view was supported by Pierre Batiffol.

Frederick Henry Ambrose Scrivener rejected Tischendorf's speculation because of differences between the two manuscripts. In Sinaiticus, the text of the Gospels is divided according to the Ammonian Sections with references to the Eusebian Canons, but Vaticanus used the older system of division. Vaticanus was prepared in a format of 5 folios in one quire, but Sinaiticus had 8 folios. According to Scrivener, Eusebian Bibles contained three or four folios per quire (Scrivener used a Latin version of Valesius). Scrivener stated that the Eusebian is unclear and should not be used for a doubtful theory.

Westcott and Hort argued the order of biblical books on the Eusebian list of the canonical books, quoted by Eusebius in "Ecclesiastical History" (III, 25), is different from every surviving manuscript. Probably none of the 50 copies survive today.

Caspar René Gregory believed that Vaticanus and Sinaiticus were written in Caesarea, and they could belong to the Eusebian fifty.

According to Victor Gardthausen Sinaiticus is younger than Vaticanus by at least 50 years.

Kirsopp Lake states "copies of three and four columns" is grammatically sound, but there appears not to be good evidence for this technical use of the words. "Sending them by threes of fours" is the most attractive, but there is no evidence that τρισσα can denote "three at a time". Regarding "in three or four columns per page," there is only one known manuscript written in that way – Sinaiticus. Sinaiticus has a curious spelling of the word κραβαττος as κραβακτος; Sinaiticus spells Ισραηλειτης as Ισδραηλειτης, Vaticanus as Ιστραηλειτης; these forms have been regarded as Latin, and they can be found in papyri from Egypt. There is no other known Greek district in which these forms were used. The argument for a Caesarean origin of these two manuscripts is much weaker than Egyptian.

According to Heinrich Schumacher, Eusebius instead prepared fifty lectionaries, not Bibles.

Skeat argued that Sinaiticus was a first attempt to produce a full Bible in fulfillment of Constantine's order but was abandoned before completion in favor of a more compact form (then languishing in Caesarea until salvaged in the sixth century), while Vaticanus was one of the fifty Bibles actually delivered to Constantinople.

Kurt Aland, Bruce M. Metzger, Bart D. Ehrman doubt that Sinaiticus and Vaticanus were copied by Eusebius on the Constantine order.

Church Construction

According to Socrates Scholasticus, Constantine commissioned the construction of the first Church of Hagia Irene in Constantinople, on the site now occupied by the Justinian church of the same name. It commemorated the peace won by Constantine and Crispus's victory over Licinius and Licinius II at the Battle of Chrysopolis in 324; its name, the Church of the Holy Peace (Ancient Greek: Ἁγία Εἰρήνη, romanized: *Hagía Eirḗnē*, lit. 'Holy Peace') recalled the Altar of Peace (Latin: *ara pacis*) built by Augustus, the first deified Roman emperor. Two other large churches were dedicated to Saint Mocius and to Saint Acacius; both worthies had supposedly been martyred in Byzantium during the Diocletianic Persecution. The Church of St Mocius was supposed to have included parts of a former temple of Zeus or Hercules, though it is unlikely that such a temple existed on the site, which was without the walls of the Constantinian city as well as of erstwhile Severan Byzantium. According to Eusebius, Christian liturgies were also performed in Constantine's Mausoleum, the site of which became the Church of the Holy Apostles; although Eusebius does not mention any Byzantine church by name, he reports that Christian sites were numerous inside the city and around it. Later tradition ascribed to Constantine the foundations in Constantinople of the Church of Saint Menas, the Church of Saint Agathonicus, the Church of Saint Michael at nearby Anaplous, and the Church of Hagios Dynamis (Ancient Greek: Ἅγιος Δύναμις, romanized: *Hagíos Dynamis*, lit. 'Holy Power').

Christian Emperorship

Enforcement of Doctrine

The reign of Constantine established a precedent for the position of the Christian emperor in the Church. Emperors considered themselves responsible to the gods for the spiritual health of their subjects, and after Constantine they had a duty to help the Church define and maintain orthodoxy. The Church generally regarded the definition of doctrine as the responsibility of the bishops; the emperor's role was to enforce doctrine, root out heresy, and uphold ecclesiastical unity. The emperor ensured that God was properly worshiped in his empire; what proper worship (orthodoxy) and doctrines and dogma consisted of was for the Church to determine.

Constantine had become a worshiper of the Christian God, but he found that there were many opinions on that worship and indeed on who and what that God was. In 316, Constantine was asked to adjudicate in a North African dispute of the Donatist sect (who began by refusing obedience to any bishops who had yielded in any way to persecution, later regarding all bishops but their own sect as utterly contaminated). More significantly, in 325 he summoned the First Council of Nicaea, effectively the first ecumenical council (unless the Council of Jerusalem is so classified). The Council of Nicaea is the first major attempt by Christians to define orthodoxy for the whole state. Until Nicaea, all previous Church councils had been local or regional synods affecting only portions of the Church.

Nicaea dealt primarily with the Arian controversy. Constantine was torn between the Arian and Trinitarian camps. After the Nicene council, and against its conclusions, he eventually recalled Arius from exile and banished Athanasius of Alexandria to Trier.

Just before his death in May 337, it is claimed that Constantine was baptised into Christianity. Up until this time he had been a catechumen for most of his adult life. He believed that if he waited to get baptized on his death bed he was in less danger of polluting his soul with sin and not getting to heaven. He was baptized by his distant relative Arian Bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia or by Pope Sylvester I which is maintained by the Catholic Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Antiochian Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, upon by many other Eastern Orthodox, Nestorian Orthodox, and Oriental Orthodox Churches. During Eusebius of Nicomedia's time in the imperial court, the Eastern court and the major positions in the Eastern Church were held by Arians or Arian sympathizers. With the exception of a short period of eclipse, Eusebius enjoyed the complete confidence both of Constantine and Constantius II and was the tutor of Emperor Julian the Apostate. After Constantine's death, his son and successor Constantius II was an Arian, as was Emperor Valens.

Suppression of other Religions

Constantine's position on the religions traditionally practiced in Rome evolved during his reign. In fact, his coinage and other official motifs, until 325, had affiliated him with the pagan cult of Sol Invictus. At first, Constantine encouraged the construction of new temples and tolerated traditional sacrifices; by the end of his reign, he had begun to order the pillaging and tearing down of Roman temples.

Beyond the *limes*, east of the Euphrates, the Sasanian rulers, perennially at war with Rome, had usually tolerated Christianity. Constantine is said to have written to Shapur II in 324 and urged him to protect Christians under his rule. With the establishment of Catholicism as the state religion of the Roman Empire, Christians in Persia would be regarded as allies of Persia's ancient enemy. According to an anonymous Christian account, Shapur II wrote to his generals:

> *You will arrest Simon, chief of the Christians. You will keep him until he signs this document and consents to collect for us a double tax and double tribute from the Christians ... for we Gods have all the trials of war and they have nothing but repose and pleasure. They inhabit our territory and agree with Caesar, our enemy.*
> ***—Shapur II, A History of Christianity in Asia: Beginnings to 1500***

Constantinian Shift

Constantinian shift is a term used by some theologians and historians of antiquity to describe the political and theological aspects and outcomes of the 4th-century process of Constantine's integration of the imperial government with the Catholic Church that began with the First Council of Nicaea. The term was popularized by the Mennonite theologian John H. Yoder. The claim that there ever was a Constantinian shift has been disputed; Peter Leithart argues that there was a "brief, ambiguous 'Constantinian moment' in the fourth century," but that there was "no permanent, epochal 'Constantinian shift'."

Historiography of the Christianization of the Roman Empire

The growth of early Christianity from its obscure origin c. AD 40, with fewer than 1,000 followers, to being the majority religion of the entire Roman Empire by AD 400, has been examined through a wide variety of historiographical approaches.

Until the last decades of the 20th century, the primary theory was provided by Edward Gibbon in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, published in 1776. Gibbon theorized that paganism declined from the second century BC and was finally eliminated by the top-down imposition of Christianity by Constantine, the first Christian emperor, and his successors in the fourth century AD.

For over 200 years, Gibbon's model and its expanded explanatory versions—the conflict model and the legislative model—have provided the major narrative. The conflict model asserts that Christianity rose in conflict with paganism, defeating it only after emperors became Christian and were willing to use their power to require conversion through coercion. The legislative model is based on the Theodosian Code published in AD 438.

In the last decade of the 20th century and into the 21st century, multiple new discoveries of texts and documents, along with new research (such as modern archaeology and numismatics), combined with new fields of study (such as sociology and anthropology) and modern mathematical modeling, have undermined much of this traditional view. According to modern theories, Christianity became established in the third century, before Constantine, paganism did not end in the fourth century, and imperial legislation had only limited effect before the era of the Eastern emperor Justinian I (reign 527 to 565). In the twenty-first century, the conflict model has become marginalized, while a grassroots theory has developed.

Alternative theories involve psychology or evolution of cultural selection, with many 21st-century scholars asserting that sociological models such as network theory and diffusion of innovation provide the most insight into the societal change. Sociology has also generated the theory that Christianity spread as a grass roots movement that grew from the bottom up; it includes ideas and practices such as charity, egalitarianism, accessibility and a clear message, demonstrating its appeal to people over the alternatives available to most in the Roman Empire of the time. The effects of this religious change are seen as mixed and are debated.

History

Of Historiography

The standard view of paganism (traditional city-based polytheistic Graeco-Roman religion) in the Roman empire has long been one of decline beginning in the second and first centuries BC. Decline was interrupted by the short-lived 'Restoration' under the emperor Augustus (reign 27 BC – AD 14), then it resumed. In the process of decline, it has been thought that Roman religion embraced emperor worship, the 'oriental cults' and Christianity as symptoms of that decline. Christianity emerged as a major religious movement in the Roman Empire, the barbarian kingdoms of the West, in neighboring kingdoms and some parts of the Persian and Sassanian empires.

The major narrative concerning the rise of Christianity has, for over 200 years since its publication in 1776, been taken primarily from historian Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall.* Gibbon had seen Constantine as driven by "boundless ambition" and a desire for personal glory to force Christianity on the rest of the empire in a cynical, political move thereby achieving, "in less than a century, the final conquest of the Roman empire". It wasn't until 1936 that scholars such as Arnaldo Momigliano began to question Gibbon's view.

In 1953, art historian Alois Riegl provided the first true departure, writing that there were no qualitative differences in art and no periods of decline throughout Late Antiquity. In 1975, the concept of "history" was expanded to include sources outside ancient historical narrative and traditional literary works. The evidentiary basis expanded to include legal practices, economics, the history of ideas, coins, gravestones, architecture, archaeology and more. In the 1980s, syntheses began to pull together the results of this more detailed work. In the closing quarter of the twentieth century, scholarship advanced significantly.

Gibbon's historical sources were almost exclusively Christian literary documents. These documents have a starkly supernatural quality, and many are hagiographical. They present the rise of Christianity in terms of conquest which had taken place in Heaven where the Christian God had defeated the pagan gods. Fourth century Christian writers depict Constantine's conversion as proof of that defeat, and Christian writings are filled with proclaiming their heavenly "triumph".

According to Peter Brown: "The belief that Late Antiquity witnessed the death of paganism and the triumph of monotheism, ... is not actual history but is, instead, a "representation" of the history of the age created by "a brilliant generation of Christian writers, polemicists and preachers in the last decade of this period". Ramsay MacMullen writes that: "We may fairly accuse the historical record of having failed us, not just in the familiar way, being simply insufficient, but also through being distorted". Historian Rita Lizzi Testa adds "Transcending the limitations of the Enlightenment's interpretive categories" has meant restructuring understanding of the late Roman empire. The result has been a radically altered picture. According to the *Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, scholars have largely abandoned Gibbon's views of decline, crisis and fall.

Most contemporary scholars, such as philosophy professor Antonio Donato, consider current understanding to be more precise and accurate than ever before. However, this "new view" has also been criticized, and the decline of paganism has been taken up again by some scholars. Not all the classic themes have lost their value in current scholarship. In 2001, Wolf Liebeschuetz suggested that some special situations, such as the era between the imperial age and the Middle ages, require the concept of crisis to be understood.

Roman Religion

Religion in Graeco-Roman times differed from religion in modern times. In the early Roman Empire religion was polytheistic and local. It was not focused on the individual but was focused on the good of the city: it was a civic religion in which ritual was the main form of worship. Politics and religion were intertwined, and many public rituals were performed by public officials. Respect for ancestral custom was a large part of polytheistic belief and practice, and members of the local society were expected to take part in public rituals.

Roman historians, such as the classicist J. A. North, have written that Roman imperial culture began in the first century with religion embedded in the city-state, then gradually shifted to religion as a personal choice. Roman religion's willingness to adopt foreign gods and practices into its pantheon meant that, as Rome expanded, it also gained local gods which offered different characteristics, experiences, insights, and stories. There is consensus among scholars that religious identity became increasingly separated from civic and political identity, progressively giving way to the plurality of religious options rooted in other identities, needs and interests.

Formerly, scholars believed that this plurality contributed to the slow decline of polytheism that began in the second century BC, and this axiom was rarely challenged. James B. Rives, classics scholar, has written that:

> *Evidence for neglect and manipulation could readily be found, ... But, as more recent scholars have argued, this evidence has often been cited without proper consideration of its context; at the same time, other evidence that presents a different picture has been dismissed out of hand.*

Context and other evidence

After 1990, evidence expanded and altered the picture of late antique paganism. For example, private cults of the emperor were previously greatly underestimated. For many years, the imperial cult was regarded by the majority of scholars as both a symptom and a cause of the final decline of traditional Graeco-Roman religion. It was assumed this kind of worship of a man could only be possible in a system that had become completely devoid of real religious meaning. It was, therefore, generally treated as a "political phenomenon cloaked in religious dress". However, scholarship of the twenty-first century has shifted toward seeing it as a genuine religious phenomenon.

Classical scholar Simon Price used anthropological models to show that the imperial cult's rituals and iconography were elements of a way of thinking that people formed as a means of coming to terms with the tremendous power of Roman emperors. The emperor was "conceived in terms of honors ... as the representation of power" personifying the intermediary between the human and the divine. According to Rives, "Most recent scholars have accepted Price's approach".

Recent literary evidence reveals emperor worship at the domestic level with his image "among the household gods". Innumerable small images of emperors have been found in a wide range of media that are being reevaluated as religiously significant. Rives adds that "epigraphic evidence reveals the existence of numerous private associations of 'worshippers of the emperor' or 'of the emperor's image', many of which seem to have developed from household associations". It is now recognized that these private cults were "very common and widespread indeed, in the domus, in the streets, in public squares, in Rome itself (perhaps there in particular) as well as outside the capital".

Spread of Christianity

Origin

Christianity emerged as a sect of Second Temple Judaism in Roman Judaea, part of the syncretistic Hellenistic world of the first century AD, which was dominated by Roman law and Greek culture. It started with the ministry of Jesus, who proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God. After his death by crucifixion, some of his followers are said to have seen Jesus, and proclaimed him to be alive and resurrected by God.

When Christianity spread beyond Judaea, it first arrived in Jewish diaspora communities. The early Gospel message spread orally, probably originally in Aramaic, but almost immediately also in Greek. Within the first century, the messages began to be recorded in writing and spread abroad. The earliest writings are generally thought to be those of the Apostle Paul who spoke of Jesus as both divine and human. The degree of each of these characteristics later became cause for controversy beginning with Gnosticism which denied Jesus' humanity and Arianism which downgraded his divinity.

Christianity began to expand almost immediately from its initial Jewish base to Gentiles (non-Jews). Both Peter and Paul are sometimes referred to as Apostles to the Gentiles. This led to disputes with those requiring the continued observance of the whole Mosaic law including the requirement for circumcision. James the Just called the Council of Jerusalem (around AD 50) which determined that converts should avoid "pollution of idols, fornication, things strangled, and blood" but should not be required to follow other aspects of Jewish Law (KJV, Acts 15:20–21). As Christianity grew in the Gentile world, it underwent a gradual separation from Judaism.

Christianization was never a one-way process. Instead, there has always been a kind of parallelism as it absorbed indigenous elements just as indigenous religions absorbed aspects of Christianity. Michelle Salzman has shown that in the process of converting the Roman Empire's aristocracy, Christianity absorbed the values of that aristocracy. Several early Christian writers, including Justin (2nd century), Tertullian, and Origen (3rd century) wrote of Mithraists "copying" Christian beliefs. Christianity adopted aspects of Platonic thought, names for months and days of the week – even the concept of a seven-day week – from Roman paganism. Bruce David Forbes says that "Some way or another, Christmas was started to compete with rival Roman religions, or to co-opt the winter celebrations as a way to spread Christianity, or to baptize the winter festivals with Christian meaning in an effort to limit their [drunken] excesses. Most likely all three". Some scholars have suggested that characteristics of some pagan gods — or at least their roles — were transferred to Christian saints after the fourth century. Demetrius of Thessaloniki became venerated as the patron of agriculture during the Middle Ages. According to historian Hans Kloft, that was because the Eleusinian Mysteries, Demeter's cult, ended in the 4th century, and the Greek rural population gradually transferred her rites and roles onto the Christian saint Demetrius.

Reception and Growth in Roman Society

For the followers of traditional Roman religions, Christianity was seen as an odd entity, not quite Roman, but not quite barbarian either. Christians criticized fundamental beliefs of Roman society, and refused to participate in rituals, festivals and the imperial cult. They were a target for suspicion and rumor, including rumors that they were politically subversive and practiced black magic, incest and cannibalism. Conversions tore families apart: Justin Martyr tells of a pagan husband who denounced his Christian wife, and Tertullian tells of children disinherited for becoming Christians. Despite this, for most of its first three centuries, Christianity was usually tolerated, and episodes of persecution tended to be localized actions by mobs and governors. Suetonius and Tacitus both record emperor Nero persecuting Christians in the mid-1st century, however this only occurred within Rome itself. There were no empire-wide persecutions until Christianity reached a critical juncture in the mid-third century.

Beginning with less than 1000 people, by the year 100, Christianity had grown to perhaps one hundred small household churches consisting of an average of around seventy (12–200) members each. These churches were a segmented series of small groups. By 200, Christian numbers had grown to over 200,000 people, and communities with an average size of 500–1000 people existed in approximately 200–400 towns. By the mid-3rd century, the little house-churches where Christians had assembled were being succeeded by buildings adapted or designed to be churches complete with assembly rooms, classrooms, and dining rooms. The earliest dated church building to survive comes from around this time.

In his mathematical modelling, Rodney Stark estimates that Christians made up around 1.9% of the Roman population in 250. That year, Decius made it a capital offence to refuse to make sacrifices to Roman Gods, although it did not outlaw Christian worship and may not have targeted Christians specifically. Valerian pursued similar policies later that decade. These were followed by a 40-year period of tolerance known as the "little peace of the Church". Christianity grew in that time to have a major demographic presence. Stark, building on earlier estimates by theologian Robert M. Grant and historian Ramsay MacMullen, estimates that Christians made up around ten percent of the Roman population by 300. The last and most severe official persecution, the Diocletianic Persecution, took place in 303–311.

Under Constantine and his Christian successors

Constantine, who gained full control of the empire in 312, became the first Christian emperor. Although he was not baptised until shortly before his death, he pursued policies that were favorable to Christianity. The Edict of Milan of 313 ended official persecutions of Christianity extending toleration to all religions. Constantine supported the Church financially, built basilicas, granted privileges to clergy which had previously been available only to pagan priests (such as exemption from certain taxes), promoted Christians to high office, and returned property confiscated during the persecutions. He also sponsored the First Council of Nicea to codify aspects of Christian doctrine.

According to Stark, the rate of Christianity's growth under its first Christian emperor in the 4th century did not alter (more than normal regional fluctuations) from its rate of growth in the first three centuries. However, since Stark describes an exponential growth curve, he adds that this "probably was a period of 'miraculous seeming' growth in terms of absolute numbers". By the middle of the century, it is likely that Christians comprised just over half of the empire's population.

A study by Edwin A. Judge, social scientist, shows that a fully organized church system existed before Constantine and the Council of Nicea. From this, Judge concludes "the argument Christianity owed its triumph to its adoption by Constantine cannot be sustained". Critical mass had been achieved in the hundred years between 150 and 250 which saw Christianity move from fewer than 50,000 adherents to over a million. There was a significant rise in the absolute number of Christians in the rest of the third century. Classics professor Seth Schwartz states the number of Christians in existence by the end of the third century indicates Christianity's successful establishment predated Constantine.

Under Constantine and his sons, certain pagan rites, including animal sacrifice and divination, began being deprived of their previous position in Roman civilization. Yet other pagan practices were tolerated, Constantine did not stop the established state support of the traditional religious institutions, nor did society substantially change its pagan nature under his rule. Constantine's policies were largely continued by his sons though not universally or continuously.

Peter Brown has written that, "it would be profoundly misleading" to claim that the cultural and social changes that took place in Late Antiquity reflected "in any way" a process of Christianization. Instead, the "flowering of a vigorous public culture that polytheists, Jews and Christians alike could share... [that] could be described as Christian "only in the narrowest sense" developed. It is true that blood sacrifice played no part in that culture, but the sheer success and unusual stability of the Constantinian and post-Constantinian state also ensured that "the edges of potential conflict were blurred... It would be wrong to look for further signs of Christianization at this time. It is impossible to speak of a Christian empire as existing before Justinian".

Theodosius I

In the centuries following his death, Theodosius I (347 – 395) gained a reputation as the emperor who targeted and eliminated paganism in order to establish Nicene Christianity as the official religion of the empire. Modern historians see this as an interpretation of history rather than actual history. Cameron writes that Theodosius's predecessors Constantine, Constantius, and Valens had all been semi-Arians; therefore, Christian literary tradition gave the orthodox Theodosius most of the credit for the final triumph of Christianity.

In keeping with this view of Theodosius, some previous scholars interpreted the Edict of Thessalonica (380) as establishing Christianity as the state religion. German ancient historian Karl Leo Noethlichs [de] writes that the Edict of Thessalonica did not declare Christianity to be the official religion of the empire, and it gave no advantage to Christians over other faiths. The Edict was addressed to the people of the city of Constantinople, it opposed Arianism, attempted to establish unity in Christianity and suppress heresy. Hungarian legal scholar Pál Sáry says it is clear from mandates issued in the years after 380 that Theodosius had made no requirement in the Edict for pagans or Jews to convert to Christianity: "In 393, the emperor was gravely disturbed that the Jewish assemblies had been forbidden in certain places. For this reason, he stated with emphasis that the sect of the Jews was forbidden by no law."

There is little, if any, evidence that Theodosius I pursued an active policy against the traditional cults, though he did reinforce laws against sacrifice, and write several laws against all forms of heresy. Scholars generally agree that Theodosius began his rule with a cautiously tolerant attitude and policy toward pagans. Three successive laws issued in February 391 and in June and November of 392 have been seen by some as a marked change in Theodosius' policy putting an end to tolerance. Roman historian Alan Cameron has written on the laws of 391 and June 392 as being responses to local appeals that restated, as instructions, what had been requested by the locals. Cameron says these laws were never intended to be binding on the population at large.

The law of 8 November 392 has been described by some as the universal ban on paganism that made Christianity the official religion of the empire. The law was addressed only to Rufinus in the East, it makes no mention of Christianity, and it focuses on practices of private domestic sacrifice: the *lares*, the *penates* and the *genius*. The *lares* is the god who takes care of the home, write archaeologists Konstantinos Bilias and Francesca Grigolo. The *genius* was fixed on a person, usually the head of the household. The *penates* were the divinities who provided and guarded the food and possessions of the household. Sacrifice had largely ended by the time of Julian (361-363), a generation before the law of November 392 was issued, but these private, domestic, sometimes daily, sacrifices were thought to have "slipped out from under public control". Sozomen, the Constantinopolitan lawyer, wrote a history of the church around 443 where he evaluates the law of 8 November 392 as having had only minor significance at the time it was issued.

Historical and literary sources, excepting the laws themselves, do not support the view that Theodosius created an environment of intolerance and persecution of pagans. During the reign of Theodosius, pagans were continuously appointed to prominent positions, and pagan aristocrats remained in high offices. During his first official tour of Italy (389–391), the emperor won over the influential pagan lobby in the Roman Senate by appointing its foremost members to important administrative posts. Theodosius also nominated the last pair of pagan consuls in Roman history (Tatianus and Symmachus) in 391. Theodosius allowed pagan practices – that did not involve sacrifice – to be performed publicly and temples to remain open.

He also voiced his support for the preservation of temple buildings, but failed to prevent damaging several holy sites in the eastern provinces which most scholars believe was sponsored by Cynegius, Theodosius' praetorian prefect. Some scholars have held Theodosius responsible for his prefect's behavior. Following Cynegius' death in 388, Theodosius replaced him with a moderate pagan who subsequently moved to protect the temples. There is no evidence of any desire on the part of the emperor to institute a systematic destruction of temples anywhere in the Theodosian Code, and no evidence in the archaeological record that extensive temple destruction took place.

While conceding that Theodosius's reign may have been a watershed period in the decline of the old religions, Cameron downplays the emperor's religious legislation as having a limited role. In his 2020 biography of Theodosius, Mark Hebblewhite concludes that Theodosius never saw himself, or advertised himself, as a destroyer of the old cults.

Theodosius II and Pope Leo I

By the early fifth century, the senatorial aristocracy had almost universally converted to Christianity. This Christianized Roman aristocracy was able to maintain, in Italy, up to the end of the sixth century, the secular traditions of the city of Rome. This survival of secular tradition was aided by the imperial government, but also by Pope Leo I. Peter Brown writes that from the very beginning of his pontificate in the Western Empire (440–61), Leo "ensured that the 'Romans of Rome' should have a say in the religious life of the City".

The Western Roman Empire declined during the 5th century, while the Eastern Roman Empire during the reign of Emperor Theodosius II (408–50) was functioning well. Theodosius II enjoyed a strong position at the centre of the imperial system. Decline in the West led both Eastern and Western authorities to assert their right to power and authority over the Western Empire. Theodosius II claim was based on Roman law and military power. Leo responded, using the concept of inherited 'Petrine' authority. The Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon in 449 and 451, convened by the Eastern emperors Theodosius II (407–450) and Marcianus (450–457), were unacceptable to the papacy. Pope Leo attempted to challenge the imperial decisions taken at these councils. He argued that the emperor should concern himself with 'secular matters', while 'divine matters' had a different quality and should be managed by 'priests' (sacerdotes).

Pope Leo was not successful. The Roman emperors of the first three centuries had seen the control of religion as one of their functions, taking among their titles pontifex maximus ("chief priest") of the official cults. The Western Christian emperors did not see themselves as priests, surrendering the title pontifex maximus under the emperor Gratian. The Christian Eastern emperors, on the other hand, believed the regulation of religious affairs to be one of their prerogatives. The Western emperor Valentinian III (425–55) was, in essence, appointed by Theodosius, and there is some evidence for Valentinian willingly acquiescing to the East's policies. Without the support of the Western emperor Leo accepted Theodosius' authority over the West, thereby beginning the trend toward state control of the church.

Sixth to Eighth Centuries

In 535, Justinian I attempted to assert control of Italy, resulting in the Gothic War which lasted 20 years. Once fighting ceased, the senatorial aristocracy returned to Rome for a period of reconstruction. Changes from the war, and from Justinian's 'adjustments' to Italy's administration in the decades after it, removed the supports that had allowed the aristocracy to retain power. The Senate declined rapidly at the end of the sixth and early seventh century coming to its end sometime before 630 when its building was converted into a church. Bishops stepped into roles of civic leadership in the former senator's places. The position and influence of the pope rose.

Justinian took an active concern in ecclesiastical affairs and this accelerated the trend towards the control of the Church by the State. Where Constantine had granted, through the Edict of Milan, the right to all peoples to follow freely whatever religion they wished, the religious policy of Justinian I reflected his conviction that a unified Empire presupposed unity of faith. Under emperor Justinian, "the full force of imperial legislation against deviants of all kinds, particularly religious" ones, was applied in practice, writes Judith Herrin, historian of late antiquity. Pierre Chuvin describes the severe legislation of the early Byzantine Empire, as causing the freedom of conscience that had been the major benchmark set by the Edict of Milan to be fully abolished.

Before the 800s, the 'Bishop of Rome' had no special influence over other bishops outside of Rome, and had not yet manifested as the central ecclesiastical power. There were regional versions of Christianity accepted by local clergy that it's probable the papacy would not have approved of – if they had been informed. From the late seventh to the middle of the eighth century, eleven of the thirteen men who held the position of Roman Pope were the sons of families from the East, and before they could be installed, these Popes had to be approved by the head of State, the Byzantine emperor.

The union of church and state buoyed the power and influence of both, but the Byzantine papacy, along with losses to Islam, and corresponding changes within Christianity itself, put an end to Ancient Christianity. Most scholars agree the 7th and 8th centuries are when the 'end of the ancient world' is most conclusive and well documented. Christianity transformed into its medieval forms as exemplified by the creation of the Papal state, and the alliance between the papacy and the militant Frankish king Charlemagne.

With the formation of the Papal State, the emperor's properties came into the possession of the bishop of Rome, and that is when conversions of temples into churches truly began in earnest. According to Schuddeboom, "With the sole exception of the Pantheon, all known temple conversions in the city of Rome date from the time of the Papal State". Scholarship has been divided over whether this represents Christianization as a general effort to demolish the pagan past, or was simple pragmatism, or perhaps an attempt to preserve the past's art and architecture, or some combination.

Mathematical Modelling

Demographer John D. Durand describes two types of population estimates: *benchmarks* derived from data at a given time, and *estimates* that can be carried forward or backward between such benchmarks. Reliability of each varies based on the quality of the data. Romans were "inveterate census takers," but few of their records remain. Durand says historians have pieced together the fragments of census statistics that still exist "with such historical and archaeological data as reported size of armies, quantities of grain shipments and distributions, areas of cities, and indications of the extent and intensity of cultivation of lands".

Sociologists Rodney Stark and Keith Hopkins have estimated an average compounded annual rate of growth for early Christianity that, in reality, would have varied up and down and region by region. Ancient historian Adam Schor writes that "Stark applied formal models to early Christian material... [describing] early Christianity as an organized but open movement, with a distinct social boundary, and a set kernel of doctrine. The result, he argued, was consistent conversion and higher birth rates, leading to exponential growth." Stark states a 3.4% growth rate compounded annually while Keith Hopkins uses what he calls "parametric probability" to reach 3.35%.

Art historian Robert Couzin, who specializes in Early Christianity, has studied numbers of Christian sarcophagi in Rome. He has written that "more sophisticated mathematical models (for the shape of the expansion curve) could affect certain assumptions, but not the general tendency of the numerical hypotheses".

Classical scholar Roger S. Bagnall found that, by isolating Christian names of sons and their fathers, he could trace the growth of Christianity in Roman Egypt. While Bagnall cautions about extrapolating from his work to the rest of the Roman Empire, Stark writes that a comparison of the critical years 239–315 shows a correlation of 0.86 between Stark's own projections for the overall empire and Bagnall's research on Egypt.

Though the reliability of population numbers remains open to question, Garry Runciman, historical sociologist, has written that "It seems agreed by all the standard authorities that during the course of the third century there was a significant rise, unquantifiable as it is bound to be, in the absolute number of Christians".

Possible reasons for a Top-Down Spread

Traditional conflict models

According to Bagnall, the story of the rise of Christianity has traditionally been told in terms of contest and conflict ending Roman paganism in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Recent scholarship has produced large amounts of data, with modern computer technology providing the ability to analyze it, leading to the view that paganism did not end in the late fourth century. There are many signs that a healthy paganism continued into the fifth century, and in some places, into the sixth and beyond. Archaeology indicates that in most regions the decline of paganism was slow, gradual and untraumatic.

Violence and temple destruction

Peter Brown writes that much of the previous framework for understanding Late Antiquity has been based on the dramatized "tabloid-like" accounts of the destruction of the Serapeum of Alexandria in 391, its supposed connection to the murder of Hypatia, and the application of the Theodosian law code. Written historical sources are filled with episodes of conflict, yet events in late antiquity were often dramatized by both pagans and Christians for their own ideological reasons. The language of the Code parallels that of the late fourth and early fifth century Christian apologists in Roman–style rhetoric of conquest and triumph. For many earlier historians, this created the impression of on–going violent conflict between pagans and Christians on an empire-wide scale with the destruction of the Serapeum being only one example of many temples having been destroyed by Christians.

New archaeological research has revealed that the Serapeum was the only temple destroyed in this period in Egypt. Classicist Alan Cameron writes that the Roman temples in Egypt "are among the best preserved in the ancient world". Temple destruction is attested to in 43 cases in the written sources, but only four have been confirmed by archaeological evidence. Recent scholarship has become that Hypatia's murder was largely political and probably occurred in 415 not 391. There is no evidence that the harsh penalties of the anti-sacrifice laws were ever enforced.

Some of the most influential textual sources on pagan-Christian violence concerns Martin, Bishop of Tours (c. 371–397), the Pannonian ex-soldier who is, as Salzman describes, "solely credited in the historical record as the militant converter of Gaul". The portion of the sources devoted to attacks on pagans is limited, and they all revolve around Martin using his miraculous powers to overturn pagan shrines and idols but not to ever threaten or harm people. Salzman concludes that "None of Martin's interventions led to the deaths of any Gauls, pagan or Christian. Even if one doubts the exact veracity of these incidents, the assertion that Martin preferred non-violent conversion techniques says much about the norms for conversion in Gaul" in 398 when Sulpicius Severus, who knew Martin, wrote Martin's biography.

In a comparative study of levels of violence in Roman society, German ancient historian Martin Zimmermann [de], concludes there was no increase in the level of violence in the Empire in Late Antiquity. Acts of violence had always been an aspect of Roman society, but they were isolated and rare. Archaeologist David Riggs writes that evidence from North Africa reveals a tolerance of religious pluralism and a vitality of traditional paganism much more than it shows any form of religious violence or coercion: "persuasion, such as the propagation of Christian apologetics, appears to have played a more critical role in the eventual "triumph of Christianity" than was previously assumed".

The *Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* says that "Torture and murder were not the inevitable result of the rise of Christianity." There were a few ugly incidents of local violence, but there was also a fluidity in the boundaries between the communities and what Salzman describes as "coexistence with a competitive spirit." In most regions of the Empire, pagans were simply ignored. Current evidence indicates "Jewish communities also enjoyed a century of stable, even privileged, existence" says Brown. Jan N. Bremmer has written that recent evidence shows "religious violence in Late Antiquity is mostly restricted to violent rhetoric: 'in Antiquity, not all religious violence was that religious, and not all religious violence was that violent'."

As a result, the conflict model has become marginalized in the twenty first century. According to historian Raymond Van Dam, "an approach which emphasizes conflict flounders as a means for explaining both the initial attractions of a new cult like Christianity, as well as, more importantly, its persistence". Archaeologists Luke Lavan and Michael Mulryan of the Centre for Late Antique Archaeology indicate that archaeology does not show evidence of widespread conflict. Historian Michelle Renee Salzman writes that, in light of current scholarship, violence can not be seen as a central factor in explaining the spread of Christianity in the western empire.

Socio-economic factors

Some innate characteristics of Roman Empire contributed to Christianization: travel was made easier by universal currency, laws, relative internal security and the good roads of the empire. Religious syncretism, Roman political culture, a common language, and Hellenist philosophy made Christianization easier than in places like Persia or China. Judaism was also important to the spread of Christianity; evidence clearly shows the Diaspora communities were where Christians gave many of their earliest sermons.

The fourth century developed new forms of status and wealth that included moving away from the old silver standard. Brown says Constantine consolidated loyalty at the top through his spectacular generosity, paying his army and his high officials in gold and thereby flooding the economy with gold. The imperial bureaucracy soon began demanding that taxes also be paid in gold. This created multiple problems.

"The fourth century scramble for gold ensured that the rural population was driven" hard says Brown. Eighty percent of the population provided the labor to harvest 60% of the empire's wealth, most of which was garnered by the wealthy. This contributed to unrest. Constantine reached out to the provincial elite for help with unrest and other problems, enlarging the Senate's membership from about 600 to over 2,000. This also contributed to unrest and change as the novi homines ("new men", first in their family to serve in the Roman Senate) were more willing to accept religious change. In response to all of this, bishops became intercessors in society, lobbying the powerful to practice Christian benevolence. After 370/380, wealth and cultural prestige began moving toward the Catholics.

Influence of legislation

In 429, Emperor Theodosius II (r. 402 – 450) ordered that all of the laws, from the reign of Constantine up to himself and Valentinian III, be found and codified. For the next nine years, twenty-two scholars, working in two teams, dug through archives and assembled, edited and amended empirical law into 16 books containing more than 2,500 constitutions issued between 313 and 437. It was published as the Theodosian Code in 438. The code covers political, socioeconomic, and cultural subjects with religious laws in Book 16.

Constantine and his descendants used law to grant "imperial patronage, legal rights to hold property, and financial assistance" to the church, thereby making important contributions to its success over the next hundred years. Laws that favored Christianity increased the church's status which was all important for the elites. Constantine had tremendous personal popularity and support, even amongst the pagan aristocrats, prompting some individuals to become informed about their emperor's religion. This passed along through aristocratic kinship and friendship networks and patronage ties. Emperors who modeled Christianity's moral appeal with aristocratic honor, combined with laws that made Christianity attractive to the aristocratic class, led to the conversion of the aristocracy beginning in the 360s under Gratian.

The Imperial laws collected in Chapter 10, Book XVI of the Theodosian Code provide important evidence of the intent of Christian emperors to promote Christianity, eliminate the practice of sacrifice and control magic. While it is difficult to date with any confidence any of the laws in the Code to the time of Constantine a century earlier, most scholars agree that Constantine issued the first law banning paganism's public practice of animal sacrifice. Blood sacrifice of animals (or people) was the element of pagan culture most abhorrent to Christians, though Christian emperors often tolerated other pagan practices. Brown notes that the language of the anti-sacrifice laws "was uniformly vehement", and the "penalties they proposed were frequently horrifying", evidencing the intent of "terrorizing" the populace into accepting the absence of public sacrifice being imposed by law.

However, the Code does not have the ability to tell how, or if, these policies were actually carried out. There is no record of anyone in Constantine's era being executed for sacrificing, nor is there evidence of any of the horrific punishments ever being enacted. Imperial commands provided magistrates with a license to act, but those magistrates chose how, or whether to act, for themselves, according to local circumstances. Legal anthropologist Caroline Humfress says the idea of "an empire-wide 'legal system' being imposed from above" before Justinian does not accurately reflect the social and legal realities of the earlier centuries of the Roman Empire. Humfress writes that Roman imperial law, though not irrelevant, was not a determining factor in Roman society before the sixth century.

Sacrifices continued to be performed privately, in the home, and in the country away from the imperial court, but the public ritual killing of animals seems to have largely disappeared from civic festivals by the time of Julian (361 to 363). Evidence for public sacrifices in Constantinople and Antioch altogether runs out by the end of the fourth century. Bradbury states that the complete disappearance of public sacrifice "in many towns and cities must be attributed to the atmosphere created by imperial and episcopal hostility".

Paganism in a broader sense did not end when public sacrifice did. Brown says polytheists were accustomed to offering prayers to the gods in many ways and places that did not include sacrifice: at healing springs, in caves, in deep woods, with lights, dancing, feasting and clouds of incense. "Pollution" was only associated with sacrifice, and the ban on sacrifice had fixed boundaries and limits. The end of sacrifice led to the birth of new pagan practices such as adding Neoplatonic theurgy to philosophical practices like stoicism. Pagan religions also directly transformed themselves over the next two centuries by adopting some Christian practices and ideas. Paganism thereby continued up through the sixth century with still existing centers of paganism in Athens, Gaza, Alexandria, and elsewhere.

Possible reasons for a grassroots spread

This approach sees the cultural and religious change of the early Roman Empire as the cumulative result of multiple individual behaviors. When one person learned what constituted Christian self-identification from another person, adopting and imitating that for themselves, the societal transformation called "Christianization" emerged naturally.

Peter Brown writes that the emergence of ethical monotheism in a polytheistic world was the single most crucial change made in a Late Antique culture experiencing many changes. The content of Christianity was at the center of this age, Brown adds, contributing to both a "behavioral revolution" and a "cognitive revolution" which then changed the "moral texture of the late Roman world".

A minority has argued that moral differences between pagans and Christians were not real differences. For example, Ramsay MacMullen has written that any real moral differences would need to be observable in Roman society at large, and he says there were none that were, offering as examples Christian failure to make any observable impact on the practice of slavery, increasingly cruel judicial penalties, corruption and the gladiatorial shows.

Runciman writes that recent research has shown it was the formal unconditional altruism of early Christianity that accounted for much of its early success. Sociologist E. A. Judge cites the powerful combination of new ideas, and the social impact of the church together creating the central pivotal point for the religious conversion of Rome.

New ideas

Inclusivity and exclusivity

Ancient Christianity was unhindered by either ethnic or geographical ties; it was open to being experienced as a new start, for both men and women, rich and poor; baptism was free, there were no fees, and it was intellectually egalitarian, making philosophy and ethics available to ordinary people who might not even have known how to read. Many scholars see this inclusivity as the primary reason for Christianity's success.

Historian Raymond Van Dam says conversion produced a new way of thinking and believing that involved "a fundamental reorganization in the ways people thought about themselves and others". Christianity embraced all, including "sinners"; the term for sinner (Ancient Greek: αμαρτωλοί), meaning the immoral, is a Greek term for those 'on the outside'. Its use was undermined by Jesus. Jesus did not classify everyone as sinners, but he did call for those who considered themselves insiders to repent. Paul extended the term's application to everyone, arguing that everyone is an outsider who can become an insider.

A key characteristic of these inclusive communities was their unique type of exclusivity which used belief to construct identity and social boundaries. Believing was the crucial and defining characteristic of membership; it set a "high boundary" that strongly excluded the "unbeliever". Bible scholar Paul Raymond Trebilco says that these high boundaries were set without social distancing or vilification of the outsiders themselves, since context reveals "a clear openness to these 'outsiders' and a strong 'other regard' for them". Strong boundaries for insiders, and openness to outsiders as possible converts, are both held in very real tension in New Testament and early patristic writings. However, the early Christian had exacting moral standards that included avoiding contact with those that were seen as still "in bondage to the Evil One": (2 Corinthians 6:1–18; 1 John 2: 15–18; Revelation 18: 4; II Clement 6; Epistle of Barnabas, 1920). According to Philosopher and philologist Danny Praet, the exclusivity of Christian monotheism formed an important part of its success enabling it to maintain its independence in a society that syncretized religion. He adds that this gave Christianity the powerful psychological attraction of elitism.

According to Greek scholar Matthew R. Malcolm, central to the kerygma is the concept that the power of God is manifested through Jesus in a reversal of power. In the gospel of Matthew (20:25–26) Jesus is quoted as saying: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be a servant..." Biblical scholar Wayne Meeks has written that: "the ultimate power and structure of the universe" [God] has manifested itself in human society through Jesus' act of giving up his power for the sake of love. This reversal has impact on all aspects of the message: it redefines love as an "other-regarding sacrificial act", and it redefines the nature and practice of power and authority as service to others. Meeks concludes "this must have had a very powerful, emotional appeal to people".

This included a "conscious dismantling of [Roman] concepts of hierarchy and power". From the beginning, the Pauline communities cut across the social ranks. Paul's understanding of the innate paradox of an all powerful Christ dying as a powerless man created a new social order unprecedented in classical society. New Testament scholar N. T. Wright argues that these ideas were revolutionary to the classical world.

This message contained the assertion that Christian salvation was made available to all, and it included eternal life, but not for the unbeliever. Ancient paganism had a variety of views of an afterlife from a belief in Hades to a denial of eternal life completely. Afterlife punishments can be found in other religions preceding Christianity. One scholar has concluded "Hell is a Greek invention". Praet says that much of the Roman population no longer believed in Graeco–Roman afterlife punishments, so there is no reason to expect they would take the Christian version more seriously. While it may or may not have been a major cause of conversion, writings from the Christians Justin and Tatian, the pagan Celsus, and the *Passio of Ptolemaeus and Lucius* are just some of the sources that confirm Christians did use the doctrine of eternal punishment, and that it did persuade some non-believers to convert.

The Christian teaching of bodily resurrection was new, (and not readily accepted), but most Christian views of an afterlife were not new. What they had was the novelty of exclusivity: right belief became as significant a determiner of the future as right behavior. Ancient Christians backed this up with prophecies from ages old documents and living witnesses, giving Christianity its claim to a historical base. This was new and different from paganism. Praet writes that anti-Christian polemics of the era never questioned that: "[Jesus'] birth, teachings, death and resurrection took place in the reigns of the emperors Augustus and Tiberius, and until the end of the first century, the ancient church could produce living witnesses who claimed to have seen or spoken to the Savior". Many modern scholars have seen this historical base as one of the major reasons for Christianity's success.

Kerygma

Kerygma (from Ancient Greek: κήρυγμα, *kḗrygma*) is a Greek word used in the New Testament for 'proclamation' (see Luke 4:18-19, Romans 10:14, Gospel of Matthew 3:1). It is related to the Greek verb κηρύσσω (*kērússō*), literally meaning 'to cry or proclaim as a herald' and being used in the sense of 'to proclaim, announce, preach'. Amongst biblical scholars, the term has come to mean the core of the early church's teaching about Jesus.

The Catholic Church under Pope Francis strongly emphasized the importance of the kerygma as the center of all evangelization and work of renewal, formulating it as "Jesus loves us, died for us, is alive and near us", and extolling it as the wisest and truest proclamation and stating that "all Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma."

In verbal form, the word appears around 61 times to describe the proclamation of the kingdom of God and of the ‘‘gospel of God, which he had promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures’’ (Rom 1.2). The word Kerygma itself was used in almost technically by the New Testament writers to refer to the manner in which an authorized preacher, ke¯rux (k≈rux), announced the truth that ‘‘the kingdom of God has come upon you’’ (Mt 12.28; Lk 11.20).

"Kerygmatic" is sometimes used to express the message of Jesus' whole ministry, as "a proclamation addressed not to the theoretical reason, but to the hearer as a self"; as opposed to the didactic use of Scripture that seeks understanding in the light of what is taught. The meaning of the crucifixion is central to this concept.

Some key texts in the New Testament express this:

1. The promises of God made in the Old Testament have now been fulfilled with the coming of Jesus, the Messiah (Book of Acts 2:30; 3:19, 24, 10:43; 26:6-7, 22; Epistle to the Romans 1:2-4; 1 Timothy 3:16; Epistle to the Hebrews 1:1-2; 1 Peter 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:18-19).
2. Jesus was anointed by God at his baptism as Messiah (Acts 10:38).
3. Jesus began his ministry in Galilee after his baptism (Acts 10:37), doing mighty works by the power of God (Mk 10:45; Acts 2:22; 10:38).
4. The Messiah was crucified according to the purpose of God (Mk 10:45; Jn 3:16; Acts 2:23; 3:13-15, 18; 4:11; 10:39; 26:23; Ro 8:34; 1 Corinthians 1:17-18; 15:3; Galatians 1:4; Heb 1:3; 1Peter 1:2, 19; 3:18; 1 Jn 4:10).
5. He was raised from the dead and appeared to his disciples (Acts 2:24, 31–32; 3:15, 26; 10:40-41; 17:31; 26:23; Ro 8:34; 10:9; 1Co 15:4-7, 12ff.; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 1Tim 3:16; 1Peter 1:2, 21; 3:18, 21).
6. Jesus was exalted by God (Acts 2:25-29, 33–36; 3:13; Rom 8:34; 10:9; 1Tim 3:16; Heb 1:3; 1Peter 3:22) to be the Lord (Acts 10:36; Rom 10:9).
7. He will bring the Holy Spirit to form the new community of God (Ac 1:8; 2:14-18, 33, 38–39; 10:44-47; 1Peter 1:12).
8. He will come again for judgment and the restoration of all things (Ac 3:20-21; 10:42; 17:31; 1Co 15:20-28; 1Th 1:10).
9. All who hear the message should repent and be baptized (Ac 2:21, 38; 3:19; 10:43, 47–48; 17:30; 26:20; Ro 1:17; 10:9; 1Pe 3:21).

In the 4th century, the kerygma was formally published in the Nicene Creed.

During the mid-20th century, when the literary genre of the New Testament gospels was under debate, scholars like C. H. Dodd and Rudolf Bultmann suggested that the gospels were of a genre unique in the ancient world. They called the genre *kerygma* and described it as a later development of preaching that had taken a literary form. Scholarship since then has found problems with Bultmann's theory, but in Biblical and theological discussions, the term kerygma has come to denote the irreducible essence of Christian apostolic proclamation.

The ancient Christian kerygma as summarized by Dodd from Peter's speeches in the New Testament Book of Acts was:

1. The Age of Fulfillment has dawned, the "latter days" foretold by the prophets.
2. This has taken place through the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
3. By virtue of the resurrection, Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of God as Messianic head of the new Israel.
4. The Holy Spirit in the church is the sign of Christ's present power and glory.
5. The Messianic Age will reach its consummation in the return of Christ.
6. An appeal is made for repentance with the offer of forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and salvation.

The Catholic Church has emphasized the kerygma in its teaching and work of evangelization, identifying it as "the center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal," according to Pope Francis in his programmatic document, *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Joy of the Gospel which is on the "Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World." He formulated the kergyma as “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.”

Pope Francis emphasized that the kergyma is not only first in the chronological sense, but it is "first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment...Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation. All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma, which is reflected in and constantly illumines, the work of catechesis, thereby enabling us to understand more fully the significance of every subject which the latter treats."

In his Exhortation to the youth, *Christus Vivit*, Christ is Alive, Pope Francis emphasize "what is essential", which is called "the three great truths that all of us need constantly to keep hearing": (1) God loves you: "At every moment, you are infinitely loved;" (2) Christ, out of love, sacrificed himself completely in order to save you: Christ "continues to save and redeem us by the power of his total self-surrender. Look to his cross;" (3) Christ is alive! "Alive, he can be present in your life at every moment."

Social Practices

Women

It has, for many years, been one of the axioms of scholars of early Christianity that significant numbers of women composed its earliest members. Theologian and historian Judith Lieu writes that the presence of large numbers of female converts within Christianity is not statistically documented. Pagan writers wrote polemics criticizing the attraction of women to Christianity along with the uneducated masses, children, and "thieves, burglars and poisoners", but Lieu describes this as politically motivated rhetoric that cannot be depended upon to prove the presence of large numbers of women. Lieu also notes that, "No Christian source explicitly celebrates the number of women joining their ranks".

Art historian Janet Tulloch says that "Unlike the early Christian literary tradition, in which women are largely invisible, misrepresented, or omitted entirely, female figures in early Christian art play significant roles in the transmission of the faith". Feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza wrote in her seminal work *In Memory of Her: a Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* that many of Jesus' followers were women. The Pauline epistles in the New Testament provide some of the earliest documentary sources of women as true missionary partners in expanding the Jesus movement.

In the church rolls from the second century, there is conclusive evidence of groups of women "exercising the office of widow". Historian Geoffrey Nathan says that "a widow in Roman society who had lost her husband and did not have money of her own was at the very bottom of the social ladder". The church provided practical support to those who would, otherwise, have been in destitute circumstances, and this "was in all likelihood an important factor in winning new female members".

Professor of religious studies at Brown University, Ross Kraemer, argues that Christianity offered women of this period a new sense of worth. Lieu affirms that women of note were attracted to Christianity as evidenced in the Acts of the Apostles, where mention is made of Lydia, the seller of purple at Philippi, and of other noble women at Thessalonica, Berea and Athens (17.4, 12, 33–34). Lieu writes that, "In parts of the Empire, influential women were able to use religion to negotiate a role for themselves in society that existing conceptual frameworks did not legitimate". As classics scholar Moses Finley writes, "there is no mistaking the fact that Homer fully reveals what remained true for the whole of antiquity: that women were held to be naturally inferior."

There is some evidence of disruption of traditional women's roles in some of the mystery cults, such as Cybele, but there is no evidence this went beyond the internal practices of the religion itself. The mysteries created no alternative in larger society to the established patterns. There is no evidence of any effort in Second Temple Judaism to harmonize the roles or standing of women with that of men. Roman Empire was an age of awareness of the differences between male and female. Social roles were not taken for granted. They were debated, and this was often done with some misogyny. Paul uses a basic formula of reunification of opposites, (Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 3:11) to simply wipe away such social distinctions. In speaking of slave/free, male/female, Greek/Jew, circumcised/uncircumcised, and so on, he states that "all" are "one in Christ" or that "Christ is all". This became part of the message of the early church and the practice of the Pauline communities.

Having their female (and imperfect male) babies taken from them and exposed, was an accepted fact of Roman life for most women. In 1968, J. Lindsay reported that even in large families "more than one daughter was practically never reared." There was also a high mortality rate among women due to childbirth and abortion. Elizabeth Castelli writes: "The ascetic life, especially the monastic life, may have provided women with a mode of escape from the rigors and dangers of married and maternal existence, with the prospect of an education and (in some cases) an intellectual life, and with access to social and economic power that would otherwise have eluded them".

Judith Lieu cautions that there is "good reason for rejecting a model that understands women's attraction to early Christianity... purely in terms of 'what it did for them'." A survey of the literature of the early period shows female converts as having one thing in common: that of being in danger. Women took real risks to spread the gospel. Ordinary women moved in and out of houses and shops and marketplaces, took the risk of speaking out and leading people, including children, outside the bounds of the "proper authorities". This is evident in the sanctions and labels their antagonists used against them. Power resided with the male authority figure, and he had the right to label any uncooperative female in his household as insane or possessed, to exile her from her home, and condemn her to prostitution. Kraemer theorizes that "Against such vehement opposition, the language of the ascetic forms of Christianity must have provided a strong set of validating mechanisms", attracting large numbers of women.

Sexual morality

Both the ancient Greeks and the Romans cared and wrote about sexual morality within categories of good and bad, pure and defiled, and ideal and transgression. These ethical structures were built on the Roman understanding of social status. Slaves were not thought to have an interior ethical life because they had no status; they could go no lower socially. They were commonly used sexually, while the free and well-born who used them were thought to embody social honor and the ability to exhibit the fine sense of shame and sexual modesty suited to their station. Sexual modesty meant something different for men than it did for women, and for the well-born, than it did for the poor, and for the free citizen, than it did for the slave — for whom the concepts of honor, shame and sexual modesty were said to have no meaning at all.

In the ancient Roman Empire, "shame" was a profoundly social concept that was always mediated by gender and status. "It was not enough that a wife merely regulate her sexual behavior in the accepted ways; it was required that her virtue in this area be conspicuous." Men, on the other hand, were allowed sexual freedoms such as live-in mistresses and sex with slaves. This duality permitted Roman society to find both a husband's control of a wife's sexual behavior a matter of intense importance, and at the same time see that same husband's sex with young slave boys as of little concern.

The Greeks and Romans said humanity's deepest moralities depended upon social position which was given by fate; Christians advocated the "radical notion of individual freedom centered around ... complete sexual agency". Paul the Apostle and his followers taught that "the body was a consecrated space, a point of mediation between the individual and the divine". This meant the ethical obligation for sexual self-control was to God, and it was placed on each individual, male and female, slave and free, equally, in all communities, regardless of status. It was "a revolution in the rules of behavior, but also in the very image of the human being". In the Pauline epistles, *porneia* was a single name for the array of sexual behaviors outside marital intercourse. This became a defining concept of sexual morality. Such a shift in definition utterly transformed "the deep logic of sexual morality".

Care for the poor

Professor of religion Steven C. Muir has written that "Charity was, in effect, an institutionalized policy of Christianity from its beginning. ... While this situation was not the sole reason for the group's growth, it was a significant factor". Christians showed the poor great generosity, and "there is no disputing that Christian charity was an ideology put into practice". Prior to Christianity, the wealthy elite of Rome mostly donated to civic programs designed to elevate their status, though personal acts of kindness to the poor were not unheard of. Salzman writes that the Roman practice of civic euergetism ("philanthropy publicly directed toward one's city or fellow citizens") influenced Christian charity "even as they remained distinct components of justifications for the feeding of Rome well into the late sixth century".

Health care

Two devastating epidemics, the Antonine Plague in 154 and the Plague of Cyprian in 251, killed a large number of the empire's population, though there is some debate over how many. Graeco-Roman doctors tended largely to the elite, while the poor mostly had recourse to "miracles and magic" at religious temples. Christians, on the other hand, tended to the sick and dying, as well as the aged, orphaned, exiled and widowed. Many of these caretakers were monks and nuns. Christian monasticism had emerged toward the end of the third century, and their numbers grew such that, "by the fifth century, monasticism had become a dominant force impacting all areas of society".

The monastic health care system was innovative in its methods, allowing the sick to remain within the monastery as a special class afforded special benefits and care. This destigmatized illness and legitimized the deviance from the norm that sickness includes. This formed the basis for future public health care. According to Albert Jonsen, a historian of medicine, "the second great sweep of medical history [began] at the end of the fourth century, with the founding of the first Christian hospital for the poor at Caesarea in Cappadocia." By the fifth century, the founding of hospitals for the poor had become common for bishops, abbots and abbesses. Koester argues that the success of Christianity is not simply in its message; "one has to see it also in the consistent and very well thought out establishment of institutions to serve the needs of the community".

Community

According to Stark, "Christianity did not grow because of miracle working in the marketplaces ... or because Constantine said it should, or even because the martyrs gave it such credibility. It grew because Christians constituted an intense community" which provided a unique "sense of belonging". Praet has written that, "in his very influential booklet *Pagans and Christians in an Age of Anxiety*, E. R. Dodds acknowledged ... 'Christians were in a more than formal sense 'members one of another': [Dodds thinks] that was a major cause, perhaps the strongest single cause, of the spread of Christianity".

Christian community was not just one thing. Experience and expression were diverse. Yet early Christian communities did have commonalities in the kerygma (the message), the rites of baptism and the eucharist. As far back as it can be traced, evidence indicates the rite of initiation into Christianity was always baptism. In Christianity's earliest communities, candidates for baptism were introduced by a teacher or other person willing to stand surety for their character and conduct. Baptism created a set of responsibilities within each Christian community, which some authors described in quite specific terms. Candidates for baptism were instructed in the major tenets of the faith (the kerygma), examined for moral living, sat separately in worship, could not receive the eucharist, and were generally expected to demonstrate commitment to the community and obedience to Christ's commands before being accepted into the community as a full member.

Celebration of the eucharist was the common unifier for Christian communities, and early Christians believed the kerygma, the eucharist and baptism came directly from Jesus of Nazareth. According to Dodds, "A Christian congregation was from the first a community in a much fuller sense than any corresponding group of Isis followers or Mithras devotees. Its members were bound together not only by common rites but by a common way of life".

According to New Testament professor Joseph Hellerman, New Testament writers choose 'family' as the central social metaphor to describe their community, and by doing so, they redefined the concept of family. In both Jewish and Roman tradition, genetic families were generally buried together, but an important cultural shift took place in the way Christians buried one another: they gathered unrelated Christians into a common burial space, as if they really were one family, "commemorated them with homogeneous memorials and expanded the commemorative audience to the entire local community of coreligionists". The Jewish ethic and its concept of community as family is what made "Christianity's power of attraction ... not purely religious but also social and philosophical". The Christian church was modeled on the synagogue. Christian philosophers synthesized their own views with Semitic monotheism and Greek thought. The Old Testament gave the new religion of Christianity roots reaching back to antiquity. In a society which equated dignity and truth with tradition, this was significant.

Community on a larger scale is evidenced by a study of 'letters of recommendation' that Christians created to be taken by a traveler from one group of believers to another. Security and hospitality when traveling had traditionally been undependable for most, being ensured only by, and for, those with the wealth and power to afford them. By the late third and early fourth centuries, Christians had developed a 'form letter' of recommendation, only requiring the addition of an individual's name, that extended trust and welcome and safety to the whole household of faith, "though they were strangers". Sociologist E. A. Judge writes of the fourth century diary of Egeria which documents her travels throughout the Middle East, seeing the old sites of the Biblical period, the monks, and even climbing Mount Sinai: "At every point she was met and looked after". The same benefits were applied to others carrying a Christian letter of recommendation as members of the community.

Martyrdom

The Roman government practiced systematic persecution of Christian leaders and their property in 250–51 under Decius, in 257–60 under Valerian, and expanded it after 303 under Diocletian. While it is understood by scholars that persecution did cause some apostasy and temporary setbacks in the numbers of Christians, the long term impact on Christian conversion was not negative. Peter Brown writes that "The failure of the Great Persecution of Diocletian was regarded as a confirmation of a long process of religious self-assertion against the conformism of a pagan empire." Persecution and suffering were seen by many at the time of these events, as well as by later generations of believers, as legitimizing the standing of the individual believers that died as well as legitimizing the ideology and authority of the church itself. Drake quotes Robert Markus: "The martyrs were, after the Apostles, the supreme representatives of the community of the faithful in God's presence. In them the communion of saints was most tangibly epitomized".

The result of this was summed up in the second century by Justin Martyr: "it is plain that, though beheaded and crucified, and thrown to wild beasts, and chains, and fire, and all other kinds of torture, we do not give up our confession [of Christ]; but the more such things happen, the more do others and in larger numbers become faithful, and worshippers of God through the name of Jesus". Keith Hopkins concludes that in the third century "in spite of temporary losses, Christianity grew fastest in absolute terms. In other words, in terms of number, persecution was good for Christianity".

Miracles

In the minority view, miracles and exorcisms form the most important (and possibly the only) reason for conversion to Christianity in the pre-Constantinian age. These events provide some of the best documented ancient conversions. However, there is a drop-off in the records of miracles in the crucial second and third centuries. Praet writes that "as early as the beginning of the third century, Christian authors admit that the "Golden Age" of miracles is over".

Yet, Christianity grew most rapidly at the end of that same third century indicating that the real impact of miracles in garnering new converts is questionable. In Praet's view, even if Christianity had "retained its miraculous powers", the impact of miracles on conversion would still be questionable, since pagans also produced miracles, and no one questioned that those miracles were as real as Christianity's.

Alternative approaches

Network theory

Classical archaeologist and ancient historian Anna Collar chooses network theory for explaining Christianization of the Roman Empire, saying: "it does not address why such changes take place, but it can help explain how change happened". Current studies in sociology and anthropology have shown that Christianity in its early centuries spread through its acquisition by one person from another by forming a distinct social network. Collar says that archaeological remains demonstrate that networks are formed wherever there are connections. When groups of people with different ways of life connect, interact, and exchange ideas and practices, "cultural diffusion" occurs. The more groups interact, the more cultural diffusion takes place. Diffusion is the primary method by which societies change; (it is distinct from colonialization which forces elements of a foreign culture into a society).

To understand patterns of development, social network theory treats society as a web of overlapping relationships and ties early Christian growth to its preexisting relationships. Adam M. Schor, a scholar of ancient Mediterranean history, discusses this: "Network theory aided Stark's research (with William Bainbridge) including the ground-breaking conclusion that almost all converts to modern religious groups have friendships or familial bonds with existing members. In fact, Stark used the network concept to back up his projections, positing that Christianity first grew along existing Jewish networks and existing links between Roman cities". Historian Paula Fredriksen says that it is "because of Diaspora Judaism, which is extremely well established [in the imperial age], that Christianity itself, as a new and constantly improvising form of Judaism, is able to spread as it does through the Roman world".

The kind of network formed by early Christian groups is what sociology calls a "modular scale-free network". This is a series of small "cells" that are associations of small groups of people, such as the early home churches in Ephesus and Caesaria, with popular leaders, (such as the Apostle Paul), who are the ones who hold together an otherwise unconnected small cluster of cells.

Network theory says that modular scale free networks are "robust": "they grow without central direction, but also survive most attempts to wipe them out." The third century saw the empire's greatest persecution of Christians while also being the critical century of church growth. Schor adds that "Persecutions (like Valerian's) might have thinned the Christian leadership without damaging the network's long-term growth capacity." Keith Hopkins attests that rapid growth in absolute numbers occurred only in the third and fourth centuries.

Psychology

Psychological explanations of Christianization are most often based on a belief that paganism declined during the imperial period causing an era of insecurity and anxiety. These anxious individuals were seen as the ones who sought refuge in religious communities which offered socialization. For most modern scholars, this view can no longer be maintained since traditional religion did not decline in this period, but remained into the sixth and seventh centuries, and there is no evidence of increased anxiety. Psychologist Pascal Boyer says a cognitive approach can account for the transmission of religious ideas and describe the processes whereby individuals acquire and transmit certain ideas and practices, but cognitive theory may not be sufficient to account for the social dynamics of religious movements, or the historical development of religious doctrines, which are not directly within its scope.

Evolution

This is grounded in a Neo-Darwinian theory of cultural selection. Empirical evidence indicates behaviors spread because people have a strong tendency to imitate their neighbors when they believe those neighbors are more successful. Anthropologists Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson write that Romans believed the early Christian community offered a better quality of life than the ordinary life available to most in the Roman Empire. Runciman writes of Christian altruism attracting pagans, yet also exposing the Christian groups to exploitation. It was care for the sick that primarily contributed to the spread of Christianity according to this view. Care-taking was particularly important during the severe epidemics of the Imperial period when some cities devolved into anarchy.

Pagan society had weak traditions of mutual aid, whereas the Christian community had norms that created "a miniature welfare state in an empire which for the most part lacked social services". In Christian communities, care of the sick reduced mortality by, possibly, as much as two-thirds. Extant Christian and pagan sources indicate many conversions were the result of "the appeal of such aid". According to Runciman, a distinctly Christian phenotype of strong reciprocity and unconditional benevolence produced the growth of Christianity.

Diffusion of innovation

This view combines an understanding of Christian ideology, and the utility of religion, with analysis of social networks and their environment. It focuses on the power of social interactions and how social groups communicate. In this theory, an innovation's success or failure is dependent upon the characteristics of the innovation itself, the adopters, what communication channels are used, time, and the social system in which it all happens. Ideology is always an aspect of religious innovation, but societal change is driven by the social networks formed by the people who follow the new religious innovation.

Religions adapt, adjust and change all the time, therefore a true religious innovation must be seen as a significant change – such as the shift from polytheism to monotheism – on a large scale. Collar argues that even though "the philosophical argument for one god was well known amongst the intellectual elite, ... monotheism can be called a religious innovation within the milieu of Imperial polytheism."

Having quickly begun moving outward from Jerusalem, all the largest cities in the empire had Christian congregations by the end of the first century. These became "hubs" for communicating the ongoing spread of the innovation. The variance in the times of when people responded creates a normal distribution curve. Collar writes, "there is a point on the curve that represents the crux of the diffusion process: the 'tipping point'. This 'tipping' takes place between 10 percent adoption and 20 percent adoption. Christianity achieved this tipping point between 150 and 250 when it moved from less than 50,000 adherents to over a million. This provided enough adopters for it to be self-sustaining and create further growth.

Effects

Judicial penalties and clemency

In 1986, Ramsay MacMullen wrote "What Difference did Christianity Make?" looking at the consequences of conversion rather than its causes. He has written that "Christianity made no difference"; or that it made a negative difference, saying that under the Christian emperors, judicial cruelty rose. MacMullen attributes this to Christian zeal and a belief in purgatory. On the one hand, this is problematic since, "Until the end of the twelfth century the noun *purgatorium* did not exist; *the* Purgatory had not yet been born" according to historian Jacques Le Goff. On the other hand, it is possible to identify a mounting severity in imperial criminal law. Classicist Peter Garnsey says this change takes place throughout the entire imperial period beginning under Augustus in the first century. Garnsey writes that increasing severity was the result of the political shift from a Republic to an autocratic empire.

Historian Jill Harries describes Roman justice as always harsh. It was a common belief of those in the Roman Empire that severity was a deterrent. As an example of this, Harries writes of the SC Silanianum, a particularly harsh law passed in AD 10. The SC Silanianum was originally aimed at slaves who murdered their masters, but its reach and its harshness grew as time passed.

On the one hand, increasingly harsh penalties for an ever enlarging number of capital crimes were published by emperors. On the other hand, emperors also wanted to be seen as generous in offering mercy and clemency. Beginning in the first century under Augustus, the established Roman understanding of clemency (*clementia*) began a transformation that was completed in the fourth century. Christian writers had embraced the concept of clemency and used it to express the mercy of God demonstrated in salvation, thereby combining the two concepts. The use of *clementia* to indicate forgiveness of wrongs and a mild merciful temper becomes common for writers of the Later Roman Empire.

Christianity did not grow outside Roman culture, it grew within it, ameliorating some of Rome's harsh justice and also adopting some of it. Augustine of Hippo advocated the harsh discipline of heretics that allowed some of the milder forms of physical torture. Augustine also urged the heretical Donatist bishop Donatus to practice Christian mildness when dealing with enemies. Augustine praised Marcellinus, who presided over an Imperial inquiry into the Catholic-Donatist controversy, for having conducted his investigation without using torture which was the norm. Ambrose, bishop of Milan, advised his correspondent Studius, a Christian judge, to show clemency, citing as a model Jesus' treatment of the adulteress. Garnsey has written that "Augustine, Ambrose, and other church leaders of progressive views clearly had a beneficent influence on the administration of the law, [but] it is evident that they did not attempt to promote a movement of penal reform, and did not conceive of such a movement". As Peter Brown has summarized: "When it came to the central functions of the Roman state, even the vivid Ambrose was a lightweight".

MacMullen cites Christian emperors as ceasing to use crucifixion and death by wild beasts as death penalties. Bishops, generally, opposed the death penalty. Such a penalty was consistent with the authority of the state, but it was inconsistent with the expansion of the Church through the conversion of its enemies. Arrests and punishments of heretics and all crimes against clergy were normally processed through the local bishop, and Augustine's correspondence after 405 contains many references to him using the bishop's right, and all his personal influence with Imperial officials, to intercede for those the state condemned. The State responded with the law of January 409 which made a "way the authorities could politely by-pass the 'bishop, the persuader of mercy' in arresting and punishing culprits".

Slavery

Early Christianity never openly called for the abolition of slavery, and while theologian G. François Wessels writes that it "must be conceded" that abolition was not a possibility in Paul's day, it must also be affirmed that many of the early Christians were slave owners who voiced no objection to the long–standing institution. Christians of Antiquity advised acceptance of what could not be changed, service to others with a loving attitude, and a focus on true freedom in Heaven. Their stated purpose was to change the heart of man, not the social order, and ancient Christians did not think of their movement in terms of social reform.

It is generally accepted that slavery began a decline in the second century which became more decisive as time passed, but this is usually attributed to economics rather than ideology as actual numbers of slaves necessary for comparison have not been established. However, there are ways in which it is likely Christianity did impact slavery.

The first can be seen in Paul's Epistle to Philemon, which indicates that Christianity worked to transform the slave-holding household to recognize Christian brotherhood and manumit (an established Roman practice of freeing slaves) accordingly. Wessels writes: "Onesimus, a slave, had run away from his master Philemon, but both had become Christians, and Paul sends Onesimus back home with a letter. In that letter Paul insists on Philemon's acceptance of Onesimus, no longer as a slave, but as a 'beloved brother'." Theologian Marianne Thompson has argued convincingly that "a reading of the letter to Philemon which views Paul as asking for Onesimus' spiritual reception as a brother in Christ, without the setting free of his body as a slave, assumes a 'dualistic anthropology' in Paul which his writings do not confirm". If the information in Colossians 4:7–9 is historical, the slave Onesimus was, accordingly, freed. Harper connects Paul's teaching to a "broad religious impulse toward manumission [that] runs as a submerged current through the eastern provinces".

Christianity adopted slavery as a metaphor claiming that all humans are slaves to sin. Christian rhetoric, beginning with Paul, is filled with that perspective. John Chrysostom's surviving corpus alone mentions slavery over 5,000 times. Chrysostom wrote baptismal instructions telling the officiating priest to stop at various points to remind the catechumens of how the act of baptism frees them from slavery. In legal and judicial historian Joshua C. Tate's view, "Through their baptism, the catechumens became not only free, holy, and just, but even sons of God and joint-heirs with Christ. Repeated so often, in such an important context, this message must have made a major impact on the thinking of Christian congregations and those with whom they interacted".

Outside of defeated enemies, there were three primary sources of slaves. The first most prolific source was natural reproduction (childbearing), since a child born to a slave was automatically a slave, without option, themselves. Early Christian historian Chris L. de Wet writes that Chrysostom attempted to "guard the sexual integrity of the slave by desexualizing the slave's body and criminalizing its violation. Slaves were no longer morally neutral ground – having sex with a slave while married was adultery and if unmarried, fornication". These teachings, along with the proliferation of chastity among slaves who became Christian, and the spread of ascetism through Roman society, may have lessened their sexual use and their reproductive value and impacted slavery.

The next best source of slaves was from the abandonment of unwanted children (called *exposure* because the babies were left exposed to the dangers of the wilds). These children were often picked up by strangers to be raised and sold as slaves. The third method was kidnapping. Christians interfered with these methods for resupply through new laws and actions taken against them.

Chrysostom supported the obedience of slaves to their masters. He also told his audience, which consisted mostly of wealthy slave holders, that "Slavery is the result of greed, of degradation, of brutality, since Noah, we know, had no slave, nor Abel, nor Seth, nor those who came after them. The institution was the fruit of sin". MacMullen has written that slavery was "rebuked by Ambrose, Zeno of Verona, Gaudentius of Brescia, and Maximus of Turin", among others. Evidence indicates this oft repeated discourse on slavery shaped late ancient feelings, tastes, and opinions concerning it, and this may have impacted its practice.

Persecution of Heretics

In a challenge to the assertion that the practice of charity contributed to social change and the spread of Christianity, MacMullen has written that there was hardly any charity amongst Christians toward heretics. One example often used in demonstration of this is Augustine's support of the state's use of coercion in dealing with the "heretical" Donatists. Brown says this has led to modern liberals describing Augustine as the "prince and patriarch of persecutors", since Augustine's views were referenced on into the Middle Ages.

The harsh realities Augustine faced can be found in his Letter 28 written to bishop Novatus around 416. Donatists had cut out the tongue and cut off the hands of a Bishop Rogatus who had recently converted to Catholicism, condemning him to a slow death by starvation, also attacking an unnamed count's agent who had been traveling with Rogatus. Rutgers professor of history Frederick Russell says Augustine confesses he does not know what to do. By this time, he had spent twenty years verbally appealing to the Donatists using popular propaganda, debate, personal appeal, General Councils, appeals to the emperor, and even politics, and all attempts had failed.

The empire responded with force and coercion, and Augustine came to support that approach. Augustine did not believe coercion could or would convert someone, but he did observe that it softened the "stubborn Donatists" enough to make it possible to reason with them. He thought that reason would then lead to voluntary agreement, true repentance, and change.

As Augustine's biographer, Peter Brown has written that Augustine lived in a harsh, authoritarian age of punitive punishment. Yet Augustine placed limits on the type of coercion that could be used for heretics, recommending only the milder forms in common practice in the home, school and ecclesial court. He opposed all the extreme forms of torture and maiming and capital punishment common to the empire of the time. Russell and Brown see Augustine's approach as aimed at reformation of the wrong-doer rather than punitive punishment for the wrong-doing.

Russell has written that Augustine's response on coercion was context dependent. However, political scientist Herbert A. Deane says there is a fundamental inconsistency between Augustine's political thought and "his final position of approval of the use of political and legal weapons to punish religious dissidence", and others have seconded this view.

Augustine's approach to heresy contributed to a competition – what Brown calls a "rivalry between the two factions" – that not only failed to suppress Donatism but instead contributed to its spread. Where one faction would build a church, the other would follow; Donatists and Catholics built church after church competing with each other for the loyalty of the people causing the entire landscape of Roman Africa to be "covered with a white robe of churches". The Donatists survived until the Muslim conquest of the Maghreb in the closing years of the seventh century.

Corruption

Despite corruption having a long history in Roman society, Ramsay MacMullen "attributes to the fourth century ...the spread of an ethos of venality (greed and bribery) and the displacement of aristocratic networks of patronage by the indiscriminate exchange of favors for money". He has written that this practice shows the church, and Christians in government, were universally corrupt in the fourth and fifth centuries. MacMullen's thesis has produced considerable scholarly criticism that has been dubbed the "corruption debate".

When Constantine changed from silver to gold as the monetary standard, there is evidence that greed became rampant as the ruling elite "drove a primitive system of taxation and markets to its limits" to acquire gold. One question has been whether or not this constitutes corruption. Another involves the predominance of Christians in the aristocracy as beginning in the 360s under Gratian long after Constantine's death in 337 as Salzman has documented.

Modern studies have employed many of the same sources as MacMullen, but have arrived at virtually opposite conclusions. For example, in the 1960s, political scientists examined the processes of modernization in the empire, along with those practices considered "corrupt" by modern Western standards, and found that what modern historians have termed "corruption" might "sometimes systematically, have [had] a beneficial impact on a range of important goals: 'nation-building', economic development, administrative capacity, and democratization." Tim Watson concludes that, "Even if agreement can be reached on what exactly constituted 'corrupt' behavior, there is simply not enough data" in the sources to settle the corruption debate.

Gladiator games

The games continued under Christian emperors delivering their message of Roman power "and the inevitability of Roman justice for criminals and those foreigners who had dared to challenge the empire's authority", writes classicist Roger Dunkle. Gladiators were often prisoners of war, slaves or criminals, were generally poor, non-citizens, and social outcasts with limited choices. Yet in the same era of increasing judicial harshness the courts stopped sentencing criminals to the arena. There is no source of information explaining why.

MacMullen has written that, "the role of Christianity in the abandoning of most western gladiatorial combat was nil." However, as historian Fik Meijer has written, while gladiator shows were never effectively officially politically abolished, Christians did speak out against them, and the rising number of Christians in the population in the late fourth century caused the popularity of the games to decline. It is likely the games ended from this lack of public support before 440.

Intolerance

Gibbon's 'intolerance argument' asserted that Christians, being monotheists, could not emulate the easy acceptance of other deities that characterized a polytheist system, and so were intolerant and oppressive, thereby coercing conversion out of fear. This view can be traced through the scholarship of the two centuries that came after him. According to Brown, the imperial laws, even though they were not enforced, did have a cumulative effect by 425. They set in place the religious order of Roman society: there was the Catholic church, heresies hostile to the 'true faith', and the two great 'outsiders': Judaism and all of polytheism which was jointly called 'paganism'. It is possible to follow in the laws the emergence of a language of intolerance shared by the Christian court and by vocal elements in provincial society.

Drake writes that the intolerance argument is incomplete. It can't explain why "tolerant" pagans persecuted "intolerant" Christians. It doesn't explain why Christians worried about the validity of coerced faith and resisted such aggressive actions for centuries. Drake suggests the tradition in early Christianity which favored and operated toward peace, moderation, and conciliation held that true belief could not be compelled for the simple reason that God could tell the difference between voluntary and coerced worship.

Drake says intolerance in the later centuries of the empire cannot be considered solely a religious issue. Instead, he states that intolerance was a political response to what, today, would be labeled "national security" issues. This is defined as any threat to core community values with particular regard to behaviors that appear to threaten the security of that community. Scholars of antiquity have increasingly turned to theories of identity formation and boundary maintenance to explain the increase in intolerance in the fifth century and beyond.

Difference in sexual morality

MacMullen has written that Christianity did make a moral difference in Roman Empire in the area of sexual conduct: "Here we see an absolutely remarkable impact on manners and morals that was to shape also the whole millennium to come". Classics scholar Kyle Harper states it this way: "the triumph of Christianity not only drove profound cultural change, it created a new relationship between sexual morality and society ... The legacy of Christianity lies in the dissolution of an ancient system where social and political status, power, and the transmission of social inequality to the next generation scripted the terms of sexual morality".[490] He concludes that "there are risks in over-estimating the changes in old sexual patterns that Christianity was able to promote, but there are risks, too, in underestimating Christianization as a watershed."

Sanctity of life

Historians Marc Stauch and Kay Wheat write that "in Greek and Roman times not all human life was regarded as worthy of protection. Slaves and 'barbarians' did not have a full right to life and human sacrifices and gladiatorial combat were acceptable... [F]or Plato, infanticide is one of the regular institutions of the ideal State; ... And whilst there were deviations from these views... such practices...were less proscribed in ancient times. Most historians of western morals agree that the rise of ...Christianity contributed greatly to the general feeling that human life is valuable and worthy of respect".

W.E.H.Lecky gives the now classical account in his history of European morals saying Christianity "formed a new standard" of belief in the sanctity of human life. Legal and ethical scholar John Keown distinguishes this 'sanctity of life' doctrine from "a quality of life approach, which recognizes only instrumental value in human life, and a vitalistic approach, which regards life as an absolute moral value... [Keown says it is the] sanctity of life approach ... which embeds a presumption in favor of preserving life, but concedes that there are circumstances in which life should not be preserved at all costs". This continues to provide a conceptual foundation for modern laws concerning end of life issues.

Education

By the second century, the merging of Christianity and the Greek intellectual tradition concerning education formed the belief that Christianity was the new *paideia* of mankind. Classicist Werner Jaeger has written a now classic book saying that early Christianity and its essential agreement with Plato and philosophy was understood by the early church fathers as the greatest educational power in history.

During the period of European history often called the *Dark Ages* which followed the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in AD 476, many monks sought refuge at the far fringes of the known world going to places like Cornwall, Ireland, or the Hebrides. These monks were literate, as Christian monks were taught to be, since reading for a period every day was a fixed requirement in the Rules of most monastic Orders. Monasteries routinely included schools. These monks became some of the last Western European preservers of the poetic and philosophical works of classical Western antiquity. By around AD 800 they were producing illuminated manuscripts, such as the Book of Kells, by which classical learning was re-communicated to Western Europe. As Western Europe became more orderly again, the Church remained a driving force in education, setting up Cathedral schools beginning in the Early Middle Ages as centers of education, which became medieval universities, the springboard of many of Western Europe's later achievements.

Sociological effects

The historian Geoffrey Blainey compares the Catholic Church in its first 1200 years to an early version of a welfare state: "It conducted hospitals for the old and orphanages for the young; hospices for the sick of all ages; places for the lepers; and hostels or inns where pilgrims could buy a cheap bed and meal". It supplied food to the population during famine and distributed food to the poor. The church ran schools. This was funded through the church's collection of taxes on a large scale, by the church's ownership of large farmlands and estates from the 800s, and by donations. Christian charity and the practice of feeding and clothing the poor, visiting prisoners, supporting widows and orphan children has had sweeping impact, and charity has become a common and mostly universal practice.

The formation of monasteries as organized bodies of believers distinct from the established forms of political and familial authority gradually carved out a series of social spaces with some amount of independence. This revolutionized social history, especially for women, who were then able to establish some power and influence in their own right.

Law

The canon law of the Catholic Church (Latin: *jus canonicum*) is the system of laws and legal principles made and enforced by the hierarchical authorities of the Church to regulate its external organization and government and to order and direct the activities of Catholics toward the mission of the Church. It was the first modern Western legal system and is the oldest continuously functioning legal system in the West, predating the European common law and civil law traditions.

Christianity in Late Antiquity

Christianity in late antiquity traces Christianity during the Christian Roman Empire — the period from the rise of Christianity under Emperor Constantine (c. 313), until the fall of the Western Roman Empire (c. 476). The end-date of this period varies because the transition to the sub-Roman period occurred gradually and at different times in different areas. One may generally date late ancient Christianity as lasting to the late 6th century and the re-conquests under Justinian (reigned 527–565) of the Byzantine Empire, though a more traditional end-date is 476, the year in which Odoacer deposed Romulus Augustus, traditionally considered the last western emperor.

Christianity began to spread initially from Roman Judaea without state support or endorsement. It became the state religion of Armenia in either 301 or 314, of Ethiopia in 325, and of Georgia in 337. With the Edict of Thessalonica it became the state religion of the Roman Empire in 380.

Persecution and legalisation

The Edict of Serdica was issued in 311 by the Roman emperor Galerius, officially ending the Diocletianic persecution of Christianity in the East. With the passage in 313 AD of the Edict of Milan, in which the Roman Emperors Constantine the Great and Licinius legalised the Christian religion, persecution of Christians by the Roman state ceased.

The Emperor Constantine I was exposed to Christianity by his mother, Helena. There is scholarly controversy, however, as to whether Constantine adopted his mother's Christianity in his youth, or whether he adopted it gradually over the course of his life.

In 313, he and Licinius issued the Edict of Milan, officially legalizing Christian worship. In 316, he acted as a judge in a North African dispute concerning the Donatist controversy. More significantly, in 325 he summoned the Council of Nicaea, effectively the first Ecumenical Council (unless the Council of Jerusalem is so classified), to deal mostly with the Arian controversy, but which also issued the Nicene Creed, which among other things professed a belief in *One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church*, the start of Christendom.

The reign of Constantine established a precedent for the position of the Christian Emperor in the Church. Emperors considered themselves responsible to God for the spiritual health of their subjects, and thus they had a duty to maintain orthodoxy. The emperor did not decide doctrine — that was the responsibility of the bishops — rather his role was to enforce doctrine, root out heresy, and uphold ecclesiastical unity. The emperor ensured that God was properly worshiped in his empire; what proper worship consisted of was the responsibility of the church. This precedent would continue until certain emperors of the fifth and six centuries sought to alter doctrine by imperial edict without recourse to councils, though even after this Constantine's precedent generally remained the norm.

The reign of Constantine did not bring the total unity of Christianity within the Empire. His successor in the East, Constantius II, was an Arian who kept Arian bishops at his court and installed them in various sees, expelling the orthodox bishops.

Constantius's successor, Julian, known in the Christian world as *Julian the Apostate*, was a philosopher who upon becoming emperor renounced Christianity and embraced a Neo-platonic and mystical form of paganism shocking the Christian establishment. Intent on re-establishing the prestige of the old pagan beliefs, he modified them to resemble Christian traditions such as the episcopal structure and public charity (hitherto unknown in Roman paganism). Julian eliminated most of the privileges and prestige previously afforded to the Christian Church. His reforms attempted to create a form of religious heterogeneity by, among other things, reopening pagan temples, accepting Christian bishops previously exiled as heretics, promoting Judaism, and returning Church lands to their original owners. However, Julian's short reign ended when he died while campaigning in the East. Christianity came to dominance during the reign of Julian's successors, Jovian, Valentinian I, and Valens (the last Eastern Arian Christian Emperor).

However, although state persecution ended, by the early fifth century there was still much remaining prejudice within the empire against Christians: a popular proverb at the time was, according to Augustine of Hippo, "No rain! It's all the fault of the Christians."

State religion of Rome

On February 27, 380, the Roman Empire officially adopted Trinitarian Nicene Christianity as its state religion. Prior to this date, Constantius II (337-361) and Valens (364-378) had personally favored Arian or Semi-Arianism forms of Christianity, but Valens' successor Theodosius I supported the Trinitarian doctrine as expounded in the Nicene Creed.

On this date, Theodosius I decreed that only the followers of Trinitarian Christianity were entitled to be referred to as Catholic Christians, while all others were to be considered to be practicers of heresy, which was to be considered illegal. In 385, this new legal authority of the Church resulted in the first case of many to come, of the capital punishment of a heretic, namely Priscillian.

In the several centuries of state sponsored Christianity that followed, pagans and heretical Christians were routinely persecuted by the Empire and the many kingdoms and countries that later occupied the place of the Empire, but some Germanic tribes remained Arian well into the Middle Ages.

Theology and heresy

Heresies

The earliest controversies were generally Christological in nature; that is, they were related to Jesus' (eternal) divinity or humanity. Docetism held that Jesus' humanity was merely an illusion, thus denying the incarnation. Arianism held that Jesus, while not merely mortal, was not eternally divine and was, therefore, of lesser status than God the Father (John 14:28). Modalism (also called Sabellianism or Patripassianism) is the belief that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three different modes or aspects of God, as opposed to the Trinitarian view of three distinct persons or hypostases within the Godhead. Many groups held dualistic beliefs, maintaining that reality was composed into two radically opposing parts: matter, usually seen as evil, and spirit, seen as good. Others held that both the material and spiritual worlds were created by God and were therefore both good, and that this was represented in the unified divine and human natures of Christ.

The development of doctrine, the position of orthodoxy, and the relationship between the various opinions is a matter of continuing academic debate. Since most Christians today subscribe to the doctrines established by the Nicene Creed, modern Christian theologians tend to regard the early debates as a unified orthodox position (see also Proto-orthodox Christianity and Palaeo-orthodoxy) against a minority of heretics. Other scholars, drawing upon, among other things, distinctions between Jewish Christians, Pauline Christians, and other groups such as Gnostics and Marcionites, argue that early Christianity was fragmented, with contemporaneous competing orthodoxies.

Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers

Later Church Fathers wrote volumes of theological texts, including Augustine, Gregory Nazianzus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose of Milan, Jerome, and others. What resulted was a golden age of literary and scholarly activity unmatched since the days of Virgil and Horace. Some of these fathers, such as John Chrysostom and Athanasius, suffered exile, persecution, or martyrdom from Arian Byzantine Emperors. Many of their writings are translated into English in the compilations of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.

Ecumenical Councils

During this era, several Ecumenical Councils were convened.

- First Council of Nicaea (325)
- First Council of Constantinople (381)
- First Council of Ephesus (431)
- Council of Chalcedon (451)

These were mostly concerned with Christological disputes and represent an attempt to reach an orthodox consensus and to establish a unified Christian theology. The Council of Nicaea (325) condemned Arian teachings as heresy and produced a creed (see Nicene Creed). The Council of Ephesus condemned Nestorianism and affirmed the Blessed Virgin Mary to be Theotokos ("God-bearer" or "Mother of God"). The Council of Chalcedon asserted that Christ had two natures, fully God and fully man, distinct yet always in perfect union, largely affirming Leo's "Tome." It overturned the result of the Second Council of Ephesus, condemned Monophysitism and influenced later condemnations of Monothelitism. None of the councils were universally accepted, and each major doctrinal decision resulted in a schism. The First Council of Ephesus caused the Nestorian schism in 431 and separated the Church of the East, and the Council of Chalcedon caused the Chalcedonian Schism in 451, which separated Oriental Orthodoxy.

Emperor Constantine convened this council to settle a controversial issue, the relation between Jesus Christ and God the Father. The Emperor wanted to establish universal agreement on it. Representatives came from across the Empire, subsidized by the Emperor. Previous to this council, the bishops would hold local councils, such as the Council of Jerusalem, but there had been no universal, or ecumenical, council.

The council drew up a creed, the original Nicene Creed, which received nearly unanimous support. The council's description of "God's only-begotten Son", Jesus Christ, as of the same substance with God the Father became a touchstone of Christian Trinitarianism. The council also addressed the issue of dating Easter (see Quartodecimanism and Easter controversy), recognised the right of the see of Alexandria to jurisdiction outside of its own province (by analogy with the jurisdiction exercised by Rome) and the prerogatives of the churches in Antioch and the other provinces and approved the custom by which Jerusalem was honoured, but without the metropolitan dignity.

The Council was opposed by the Arians, and Constantine tried to reconcile Arius, after whom Arianism is named, with the Church. Even when Arius died in 336, one year before the death of Constantine, the controversy continued, with various separate groups espousing Arian sympathies in one way or another. In 359, a double council of Eastern and Western bishops affirmed a formula stating that the Father and the Son were similar in accord with the scriptures, the crowning victory for Arianism. The opponents of Arianism rallied, but in the First Council of Constantinople in 381 marked the final victory of Nicene orthodoxy within the Empire, though Arianism had by then spread to the Germanic tribes, among whom it gradually disappeared after the conversion of the Franks to Catholicism in 496.

The council approved the current form of the Nicene Creed as used in the Eastern Orthodox Church and Oriental Orthodox Churches, but, except when Greek is used, with two additional Latin phrases ("Deum de Deo" and "Filioque") in the West. The form used by the Armenian Apostolic Church, which is part of Oriental Orthodoxy, has many more additions. This fuller creed may have existed before the Council and probably originated from the baptismal creed of Constantinople.

The council also condemned Apollinarism, the teaching that there was no human mind or soul in Christ. It also granted Constantinople honorary precedence over all churches save Rome.

The council did not include Western bishops or Roman legates, but it was accepted as ecumenical in the West.

Theodosius II called the council to settle the Nestorian controversy. Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, opposed use of the term Theotokos (Greek Η Θεοτόκος, "God-bearer"). This term had long been used by orthodox writers, and it was gaining popularity along with devotion to Mary as Mother of God. He reportedly taught that there were two separate persons in the incarnate Christ, though whether he actually taught this is disputed.

The council deposed Nestorius, repudiated Nestorianism as heretical, and proclaimed the Virgin Mary as the Theotokos. After quoting the Nicene Creed in its original form, as at the First Council of Nicaea, without the alterations and additions made at the First Council of Constantinople, it declared it "unlawful for any man to bring forward, or to write, or to compose a different (ἑτέραν) Faith as a rival to that established by the holy Fathers assembled with the Holy Ghost in Nicæa."

The result of the Council led to political upheaval in the church, as the Assyrian Church of the East and the Persian Sasanian Empire supported Nestorius, resulting in the Nestorian schism, which separated the Church of the East from the Latin Byzantine Church.

The council repudiated the Eutychian doctrine of Monophysitism, described and delineated the "Hypostatic Union" and two natures of Christ, human and divine; adopted the Chalcedonian Creed. For those who accept it, it is the Fourth Ecumenical Council. It rejected the decision of the Second Council of Ephesus, referred to by the pope at the time as the "Robber Council".

The Council of Chalcedon resulted in a schism, with the Oriental Orthodox Churches breaking communion with Chalcedonian Christianity.

Biblical Canon

The Biblical canon—is the set of books Christians regard as divinely inspired and thus constituting the Christian Bible-- developed over time. While there was a good measure of debate in the Early Church over the New Testament canon, the major writings were accepted by almost all Christians by the middle of the 2nd century.

Constantine commissions Bibles

In 331, Constantine I commissioned Eusebius to deliver "Fifty Bibles" for the Church of Constantinople. Athanasius (*Apol. Const. 4*) recorded Alexandrian scribes around 340 preparing Bibles for Constans. Little else is known, though there is plenty of speculation. For example, it is speculated that this may have provided motivation for canon lists, and that Codex Vaticanus, Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus are examples of these Bibles. Together with the Peshitta, these are the earliest extant Christian Bibles.

Current Canon

In his Easter letter of 367, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, gave a list of exactly the same books as what would become the New Testament canon, and he used the word "canonised" (*kanonizomena*) in regards to them. The African Synod of Hippo, in 393, approved the New Testament, as it stands today, together with the Septuagint books, a decision that was repeated by the Council of Carthage (397) and the Council of Carthage (419). These councils were under the authority of St. Augustine, who regarded the canon as already closed. Pope Damasus I's Council of Rome in 382, if the *Decretum Gelasianum* is correctly associated with it, issued a biblical canon identical to that mentioned above, or if not the list is at least a sixth-century compilation. Likewise, Damasus's commissioning of the Latin Vulgate edition of the Bible, *c.* 383, was instrumental in the fixation of the canon in the West. In 405, Pope Innocent I sent a list of the sacred books to a Gallic bishop, Exsuperius of Toulouse. When these bishops and councils spoke on the matter, however, they were not defining something new, but instead "were ratifying what had already become the mind of the Church." Thus, from the 4th century, there existed unanimity in the West concerning the New Testament canon (as it is today), and by the fifth century the East, with a few exceptions, had come to accept the Book of Revelation and thus had come into harmony on the matter of the canon.

Nonetheless, a full dogmatic articulation of the canon was not made until the 16th century and 17th century.

Church Structure within the Empire

Dioceses

After legalisation, the Church adopted the same organisational boundaries as the Empire: geographical provinces, called dioceses, corresponding to imperial governmental territorial division. The bishops, who were located in major urban centers by pre-legalisation tradition, thus oversaw each diocese. The bishop's location was his "seat", or "see"; among the sees, five held special eminence: Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria. The prestige of these sees depended in part on their apostolic founders, from whom the bishops were therefore the spiritual successors, e.g., St. Mark as founder of the See of Alexandria, St. Peter of the See of Rome, etc.

There were other significant elements: Jerusalem was the location of Christ's death and resurrection, the site of a 1st-century council, etc., see also Jerusalem in Christianity. Antioch was where Jesus' followers were first labelled as Christians, it was used in a derogatory way to berate the followers of Jesus the Christ. Rome was where SS. Peter and Paul had been martyred (killed), Constantinople was the "New Rome" where Constantine had moved his capital c. 330, and, lastly, all these cities had important relics.

The Pentarchy

By the 5th century, the ecclesiastical had evolved a hierarchical "pentarchy" or system of five sees (patriarchates), with a settled order of precedence, had been established. Rome, as the ancient capital and once largest city of the empire, was understandably given certain primacy within the pentarchy into which Christendom was now divided; though it was and still held that the patriarch of Rome was the first among equals. Constantinople was considered second in precedence as the new capital of the empire.

Among these dioceses, the five with special eminence were Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria. The prestige of most of these sees depended in part on their apostolic founders, from whom the bishops were therefore the spiritual successors. Though the patriarch of Rome was still held to be the first among equals, Constantinople was second in precedence as the new capital of the empire.

Papacy and Primacy

The Bishop of Rome has the title of Pope and the office is the "papacy." As a bishopric, its origin is consistent with the development of an episcopal structure in the 1st century. The papacy, however, also carries the notion of primacy: that the See of Rome is pre-eminent among all other sees. The origins of this concept are historically obscure; theologically, it is based on three ancient Christian traditions: (1) that the apostle Peter was pre-eminent among the apostles, see Primacy of Simon Peter, (2) that Peter ordained his successors for the Roman See, and (3) that the bishops are the successors of the apostles (apostolic succession). As long as the Papal See also happened to be the capital of the Western Empire, the prestige of the Bishop of Rome could be taken for granted without the need of sophisticated theological argumentation beyond these points; after its shift to Milan and then Ravenna, however, more detailed arguments were developed based on Matthew 16:18–19 etc. Nonetheless, in antiquity the Petrine and Apostolic quality, as well as a "primacy of respect", concerning the Roman See went unchallenged by emperors, eastern patriarchs, and the Eastern Church alike. The Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381 affirmed the primacy of Rome. Though the appellate jurisdiction of the Pope, and the position of Constantinople, would require further doctrinal clarification, by the close of Antiquity the primacy of Rome and the sophisticated theological arguments supporting it were fully developed. Just what exactly was entailed in this primacy, and its being exercised, would become a matter of controversy at certain later times.

Outside the Roman Empire

Christianity was by no means confined to the Roman Empire during late antiquity.

Church of the East

Historically, the most widespread Christian church in Asia was the Church of the East, the Christian church of Sasanian Persia. This church is often known as the Nestorian Church, due to its adoption of the doctrine of Nestorianism, which emphasized the disunity of the divine and human natures of Christ. It has also been known as the Persia Church, the East Syrian Church, the Assyrian Church, and, in China, as the "Luminous Religion".

The Church of the East developed almost wholly apart from the Greek and Roman churches. In the 5th century it endorsed the doctrine of Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople from 428 to 431, especially following the Nestorian Schism after the condemnation of Nestorius for heresy at the First Council of Ephesus. For at least twelve hundred years the Church of the East was noted for its missionary zeal, its high degree of lay participation, its superior educational standards and cultural contributions in less developed countries, and its fortitude in the face of persecution.

Iran

The Church of the East had its inception at a very early date in the buffer zone between the Roman Empire and the Parthian in Upper Mesopotamia. Edessa (now Şanlıurfa) in northwestern Mesopotamia was from apostolic times the principal center of Syriac-speaking Christianity. The missionary movement in the East began which gradually spread throughout Mesopotamia and Persia and by AD 280. When Constantine converted to Christianity the Persian Empire, suspecting a new "enemy within", became violently anti-Christian. The great persecution fell upon the Christians in Persia about the year 340. Though the religious motives were never unrelated, the primary cause of the persecution was political. Sometime before the death of Shapur II in 379, the intensity of the persecution slackened. Tradition calls it a forty-year persecution, lasting from 339-379 and ending only with Shapur's death.

Caucasus

Christianity became the official religion of Armenia in 301 or 314, when Christianity was still illegal in the Roman Empire. Some claim the Armenian Apostolic Church was founded by Gregory the Illuminator of the late third – early fourth centuries while they trace their origins to the missions of Bartholomew the Apostle and Thaddeus (Jude the Apostle) in the 1st century.

Christianity in Georgia (ancient Iberia) extends back to the 4th century, if not earlier. The Iberian king, Mirian III, converted to Christianity, probably in 326.

Ethiopia

According to the fourth-century Western historian Rufinius, it was Frumentius who brought Christianity to Ethiopia (the city of Axum) and served as its first bishop, probably shortly after 325.

Germans

The Germanic people underwent gradual Christianization from Late Antiquity. In the 4th century, the early process of Christianization of the various Germanic people was partly facilitated by the prestige of the Christian Roman Empire amongst European pagans. Until the decline of the Roman Empire, the Germanic tribes who had migrated there (with the exceptions of the Saxons, Franks, and Lombards, see below) had converted to Christianity. Many of them, notably the Goths and Vandals, adopted Arianism instead of the Trinitarian (a.k.a. Nicene or *orthodox*) beliefs that were dogmatically defined by the Church Fathers in the Nicene Creed and Council of Chalcedon. The gradual rise of Germanic Christianity was, at times, voluntary, particularly amongst groups associated with the Roman Empire.

From the 6th century AD, Germanic tribes were converted (and re-converted) by missionaries of the Catholic Church.

Many Goths converted to Christianity as individuals outside the Roman Empire. Most members of other tribes converted to Christianity when their respective tribes settled within the Empire, and most Franks and Anglo-Saxons converted a few generations later. During the later centuries following the Fall of Rome, as schism between the dioceses loyal to the Pope of Rome in the West and those loyal to the other Patriarchs in the East, most of the Germanic peoples (excepting the Crimean Goths and a few other eastern groups) would gradually become strongly allied with the Catholic Church in the West, particularly as a result of the reign of Charlemagne.

In the 3rd century, East-Germanic peoples migrated into Scythia. Gothic culture and identity emerged from various East-Germanic, local, and Roman influences. In the same period, Gothic raiders took captives among the Romans, including many Christians, (and Roman-supported raiders took captives among the Goths).

Wulfila or Ulfilas was the son or grandson of Christian captives from Sadagolthina in Cappadocia. In 337 or 341, Wulfila became the first bishop of the (Christian) Goths. By 348, one of the (Pagan) Gothic kings (*reikos*) began persecuting the Christian Goths, and Wulfila and many other Christian Goths fled to Moesia Secunda (in modern Bulgaria) in the Roman Empire. Other Christians, including Wereka, Batwin, and Saba, died in later persecutions.

Between 348 and 383, Wulfila translated the Bible into the Gothic language. Thus some Arian Christians in the west used the vernacular languages, in this case including Gothic and Latin, for services, as did Christians in the eastern Roman provinces, while most Christians in the western provinces used Latin.

The Franks and their ruling Merovingian dynasty, that had migrated to Gaul from the 3rd century had remained pagan at first. On Christmas 496, however, Clovis I following his victory at the Battle of Tolbiac converted to the *orthodox* faith of the Catholic Church and let himself be baptised at Rheims. The details of this event have been passed down by Gregory of Tours.

Monasticism

Monasticism is a form of asceticism whereby one renounces worldly pursuits (*in contempu mundi*) and concentrates solely on heavenly and spiritual pursuits, especially by the virtues humility, poverty, and chastity. It began early in the Church as a family of similar traditions, modeled upon Scriptural examples and ideals, and with roots in certain strands of Judaism. St. John the Baptist is seen as the archetypical monk, and monasticism was also inspired by the organisation of the Apostolic community as recorded in *Acts of the Apostles*.

There are two forms of monasticism: eremitic and cenobitic. Eremitic monks, or hermits, live in solitude, whereas cenobitic monks live in communities, generally in a monastery, under a rule (or code of practice) and are governed by an abbot. Originally, all Christian monks were hermits, following the example of Anthony the Great. However, the need for some form of organised spiritual guidance lead Saint Pachomius in 318 to organise his many followers in what was to become the first monastery. Soon, similar institutions were established throughout the Egyptian desert as well as the rest of the eastern half of the Roman Empire. Central figures in the development of monasticism were, in the East, St. Basil the Great, and St. Benedict in the West, who created the famous Benedictine Rule, which would become the most common rule throughout the Middle Ages.

Bishops of Rome under Constantine the Great

Constantine the Great's (272–337) relationship with the four Bishops of Rome during his reign is an important component of the history of the Papacy, and more generally the history of the Catholic Church.

The legend surrounding Constantine I's victory in the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (312) relates his vision of the Chi Rho (☧) and the text *in hoc signo vinces* in the sky and his reproducing this symbol on the shields of his troops. The following year Constantine and Licinius proclaimed the toleration of Christianity with the Edict of Milan, and in 325 Constantine convened and presided over the First Council of Nicaea, the first ecumenical council. None of this, however, has particularly much to do with the popes, who did not even attend the Council; in fact, the first bishop of Rome to be contemporaneously referred to as "Pope" (πάππας, or *pappas*) is Damasus I (366-384). Moreover, between 324 and 330, he built Constantinople as a new capital for the empire, and—with no apologies to the Roman community of Christians—relocated key Roman families and translated many Christian relics to the new churches.

The Donation of Constantine, an 8th-century forgery used to enhance the prestige and authority of popes, places the pope more centrally in the narrative of Constantinian Christianity. The legend of the Donation claims that Constantine offered his crown to Sylvester I (314-335), and even that Sylvester baptized Constantine. In reality, Constantine was baptized (nearing his death in May 337) by Eusebius of Nicomedia, who, unlike the pope, was an Arian bishop of Constantinople. Sylvester was succeeded by Mark (336) and Julius I (337-352) during the life of Constantine.

Although the "Donation" never occurred, Constantine did hand over the Lateran Palace to the bishop of Rome, and began the construction of Old Saint Peter's Basilica (the "Constantinian Basilica"). The gift of the Lateran probably occurred during the reign of Miltiades (311-314), Sylvester I's predecessor, who began using it as his residence. Old St. Peter's was begun between 326 and 330 and would have taken three decades to complete, long after the death of Constantine. Constantine's legalization of Christianity, combined with the donation of these properties, gave the bishop of Rome an unprecedented level of temporal power, for the first time creating an incentive for secular leaders to interfere with papal succession.

Background

In spite of the Diocletian Persecution, Christians constituted approximately one-tenth of the population of the Roman Empire at the time of Constantine's rise to power. Christianity was legalized by Galerius, who was the first emperor to issue an edict of toleration for all religious creeds including Christianity in April 311. Eamon Duffy characterizes the church in Rome before Constantine as "not one congregation, but a loose constellation of churches based in private houses or, as time went on and the community grew, meeting in rented halls in markets and public baths. It was without any single dominant ruling officer, its elders or leaders sharing responsibility, but distributing tasks, like that of foreign correspondent. By the eve of the conversion of Constantine, there were more than two dozen of these religious community-centers or *tituli*".

The Roman church was a small community, and its bishop exercised little influence outside its members in the time of Constantine. Constantine was the first Roman Emperor to embrace Christianity, although he likely continued in his pre-Christian beliefs. He and co-Emperor Licinius bestowed imperial favor on Christianity through the Edict of Milan promulgated in 313. After the Edict of Milan, the church adopted the same governmental structure as the Empire: geographical provinces ruled by bishops. These bishops of important cities (Metropolitan bishops) therefore rose in power over the bishops of lesser cities (later called Suffragan bishops).

Whatever his personal beliefs, Constantine's political interest in Christianity was as a unifying force and his policy of "the imposition of unity on the churches at all costs" soon set him on a "collision course with the popes."

Pope under Constantine

Miltiades

Miltiades (311–314) was pope at the time of Constantine's victory, and Constantine gifted to Miltiades the Lateran Palace, where he relocated, holding a synod in 313. Constantine designated Miltiades as one of four bishops to adjudicate the case of the Donatists, but he had no authority to decide the case or publish the result without the approval of the emperor himself. Customarily, the African bishops may have gone to the bishop of Rome as a respected, neutral figure, but it was well known that Miltiades would not agree with the Donatist position that ordination by a "traitor" bishop would invalidate the sacrament.

Turning to Constantine was a strange move because he had not yet been baptized, and word of his budding conversion may not yet have reached Alexandria. Constantine therefore referred the matter to Miltiades, requiring him to collaborate with three bishops from Gaul. Eamon Duffy calls this the "first direct intervention by an emperor in the affairs of the church." When Miltiades invited fifteen additional Italian bishops to participate in the synod and ruled against the Donatists, they appealed to Constantine again, who called for a new synod in Arles, this time headed by the bishops of Arles and Syracuse.

Council of Arles in 314

The first council of Arles took place a year after the Edict of Milan, in which Christianity became a legal religion. The council is notable also for the presence of British bishops, documenting the presence of Christianity in Roman Britain. This council was the first called by Constantine and is the forerunner of the First Council of Nicaea. Augustine of Hippo called it an Ecumenical Council. It had the following outcomes:

- Excommunication of "those who lay down their weapons in peacetime". The relevant canon has variously been interpreted as excommunicating peacetime conscientious objectors, supporting conscientious objectors, supporting Roman citizenship and excommunicating gladiators.
- Easter should be held on the same day throughout the world, rather than being set by each local church.
- Donatism was condemned as a heresy and Donatus Magnus was excommunicated. This had begun as an appeal by the Donatists to Constantine the Great against the decision of a synod in Rome in 313 at the Lateran under Pope Miltiades. The appeal had turned out unfavorably to the Donatists who afterwards became enemies of the Roman authorities.
- Canon against the non-residence of clergy,
- Canon against participation in races and gladiatorial fights (to be punished by excommunication),
- Canon against the rebaptism of heretics,
- Clergymen who could be proven to have delivered sacred books in persecution (the traditores) should be deposed, but their official acts were to be held valid.
- Ordination required the assistance of at least three bishops.
- Excommunication of all actors (theatrici) and charioteers
- Canons on other matters of discipline.

Sylvester I

Miltiades died, and his successor, Sylvester I (313–335), did not travel to Arles. The Arles synod gave Silvester I somewhat of a nod by asking him to circulate their decisions to the other bishops, although he had no part in the process. During Silvester I's reign, construction began on the Lateran Basilica, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, and St. Peter's. Silvester did not attend the first ecumenical council, the First Council of Nicaea (325), but sent two priests as his representatives; the Western bishops of Carthage and Milan were also in attendance.

Silvester would have viewed Arianism as a heresy; Constantine himself probably did not understand the complex theological issues in dispute, although he had surrounded himself with many followers of Arius, including Bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia, his eventual baptizer. Arius's followers did poorly at Nicaea, and the Nicene Creed that was adopted was squarely against their Christological position. The Arians were "silenced, not persuaded" by the Council, and the controversy in the larger Christian community was not resolved. The Arian position would persist in the East for three generations, and even eventually be adopted by Constantine's son, Constantius II. Constantine himself supported the Nicene position mainly because it was "*his* Council", and sought a compromise text that would "paper over the differences between the two sides." Eusebius remained an Arian, although he assured Constantine his views were compatible with his interpretation of the Nicene Creed, and baptized Constantine in 337.

The chief supporter of the Nicene Creed was Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria, but in 335 he was deposed and exiled to Gaul over unrelated fears about the Egyptian corn supply to Constantinople. His followers were rounded up and picked off. The key debates in Nicaea had been conducted in the Greek language, with the subtleties of particular words inciting great controversy; the Latin language of the West simply "did not yet even possess adequate terminology to handle the debate properly." The pope's legates signed onto the findings of the Council, and it continued to be supported by the next two popes, just as followers of Athanasius remained welcome in Rome, but the theological issues were little examined in the West.

Mark

Mark (336) was the first to designate the bishop of Ostia as the first among the consecrators of the new bishop of Rome (the bishop of Ostia is currently the Dean of the College of Cardinals).

Julius I

The influence of Constantine would help solidify a strong role for the Roman emperor in the selection process: Constantine chose Julius I (337–352) for all intents and purposes, and his son Constantius II exiled Liberius and installed Felix II (an Arian) as his successor.

Julius I received Athanasius, and invited the Arian Eastern bishops then in Antioch to join him in Rome. The Eastern bishops would have regarded Julius I as having an equal dignity to their own episcopate, but were not pleased that he took into his communion a bishop condemned by an Eastern synod.

Aftermath

Under Pope Liberius (352-366), the Arian conflict between the emperor and bishop of Rome culminated in the Synod of Arles (353), convened by Constantius II. Therein, Liberius's legates signed a declaration condemning the Council of Nicaea. When Liberius himself refused to cooperate, he was exiled. Pope Damasus, (366-384) was able to largely suppress the Arians with the help of Emperor Theodosius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Ambrose of Milan.

Historiography

The Donation of Constantine purported to memorialize the transfer to Sylvester I and his successors of dominion over the entire Western Roman Empire for the consideration of Sylvester I's instruction of Constantine in Christianity, baptism of Constantine, and curing Constantine of leprosy. Constantine allegedly kept for himself only the Eastern Roman Empire. The forgery was probably constructed during the Frankish Papacy, when Pope Stephen II became the first pope to cross the Alps to crown Pepin the Short, who issued the Donation of Pepin (a non-forgery), granting the pope control of the lands of the Lombards, which coalesced into the first fragments of the Papal States.

It was not long before the document was denounced as a forgery, notably by Otto III, Holy Roman Emperor (r. 983-1002). By the mid 15th century, not even the popes themselves regarded the document as genuine. Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla further proved its falsity in 1440 by showing that its Latin language did not correspond to that of the 4th century. The "Donation" purports to acknowledge the primacy of Rome over Antioch, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Constantinople, even though the last of these had not even been founded at the time of the claimed Donation.

The myth of the "Donation of Constantine" is embellished further in a 5th-century hagiographic text *Vita S Silvestri* (or *Actus S Silvestri*). Among other things, the document claims that Silvester I slew a dragon that had been threatening Rome. The text says that all of these events occurred right after Constantine's entry into the city following the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, despite the fact that Silvester I did not become bishop until 314. These events were incorporated uncritically into the *Liber pontificalis* c. 530. John Malalas further embellished the story in his *Chronicon*, which claimed that Silvester I baptized not only Constantine, but his mother Helena, and—for good measure—a large group of his relatives and Roman bystanders. Theophanes the Confessor in his *Chronicle* c. 815-820 adds Constantine's son Crispus to the list and viciously attacks contrary accounts as Arian lies; Theophanes refers to the Lateran Baptistery as the "Baptistry of Constantine."

Pope Pius V's *Breviarum Romanum* (1568) and Pope Gregory XIII's *Martyrologium Romanum* (1584) also asserted that Silvester I was the baptizer of Constantine. When Pope Sixtus V erected the Egyptian obelisk to the north of the Lateran Basilica in 1588, he added to the base the inscription "Constantine was baptized here." Cardinal Cesare Baroni continued to claim this in his *Annales Ecclesiastici* (1592) and a French author has claimed this as recently as 1906.

This falsified version of Constantine's baptism has found its way into a great deal of ecclesiastical art. Depictions include the Stavelot Triptych (c. 1165), frescoes in I Santi Quattro Coronati, stained glass in the St Michael and All Angels' Church, Ashton-under-Lyne, and—most famously—Raphael's *The Baptism of Constantine* in the Raphael Rooms of the Apostolic Palace.

Constantine the Great and Judaism

When Constantine the Great came to power in 306, he worked to stop the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. However, this led to a large split in the treatment of Christians and Jews.

Anti-Judaic legislation

Under Constantine the Great, Jewish clergy were given the same exemptions as Christian clergy. Jews living in the Roman Empire were legally obliged to pay the Fiscus Judaicus tax since the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 CE. This tax continued during his reign and some historians credit the emperor Julian with abolishing this in 362.

It was noted that Judaism was “an abominable sect”.

He also began to claim land in Syria Palaestina for use by the Christian Church. During a visit by his mother in 326 to 327, she identified places where key events may have taken place in Jesus’ life; Constantine went on build churches at those locations.

The dating of Easter

Constantine supported the separation of the date of Easter from the Jewish Passover (see also Quartodecimanism), stating in his letter after the First Council of Nicaea (which had already decided the matter):

> *"... it appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul ... Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd; for we have received from our Saviour a different way."*

According to Mark DelCogliano, “it was not the quartodeciman practice that Constantine sought to eliminate, but rather the so-called 'Protopaschite' practice which calculated the paschal full moon according to the Jewish lunar calendar and not the Julian solar calendar".

Theodoret's *Ecclesiastical History* records *The Epistle of the Emperor Constantine, concerning the matters transacted at the Council, addressed to those Bishops who were not present*:

> *"It was, in the first place, declared improper to follow the custom of the Jews in the celebration of this holy festival, because, their hands having been stained with crime, the minds of these wretched men are necessarily blinded. ... Let us, then, have nothing in common with the Jews, who are our adversaries. ... Let us ... studiously avoiding all contact with that evil way. ... For how can they entertain right views on any point who, after having compassed the death of the Lord, being out of their minds, are guided not by sound reason, but by an unrestrained passion, wherever their innate madness carries them. ... lest your pure minds should appear to share in the customs of a people so utterly depraved. ... Therefore, this irregularity must be corrected, in order that we may no more have any thing in common with those parricides and the murderers of our Lord. ... no single point in common with the perjury of the Jews."*

Administrative Reforms

Beginning in the mid-3rd century, the emperors began to favour members of the equestrian order over senators, who had a monopoly on the most important offices of the state. Senators were stripped of the command of legions and most provincial governorships, as it was felt that they lacked the specialised military upbringing needed in an age of acute defense needs; such posts were given to equestrians by Diocletian and his colleagues, following a practice enforced piecemeal by their predecessors. The emperors, however, still needed the talents and the help of the very rich, who were relied on to maintain social order and cohesion by means of a web of powerful influence and contacts at all levels. Exclusion of the old senatorial aristocracy threatened this arrangement.

In 326 Constantine reversed this pro-equestrian trend, raising many administrative positions to senatorial rank and thus opening these offices to the old aristocracy; at the same time, he elevated the rank of existing equestrian office-holders to senator, degrading the equestrian order in the process (at least as a bureaucratic rank). The title of *perfectissimus* was granted only to mid- or low-level officials by the end of the 4th century.

By the new Constantinian arrangement, one could become a senator by being elected praetor or by fulfilling a function of senatorial rank. From then on, holding actual power and social status were melded together into a joint imperial hierarchy. Constantine gained the support of the old nobility with this, as the Senate was allowed to elect praetors and quaestors in place of the usual practice of the emperors directly creating magistrates (*adlectio*). An inscription in honour of city prefect Ceionius Rufus Albinus states that Constantine had restored the Senate "the *auctoritas* it had lost at Caesar's time".

The Senate as a body remained devoid of any significant power; nevertheless, the senators had been marginalised as potential holders of imperial functions during the 3rd century but could dispute such positions alongside more upstart bureaucrats. Some modern historians see in those administrative reforms an attempt by Constantine at reintegrating the senatorial order into the imperial administrative elite to counter the possibility of alienating pagan senators from a Christianised imperial rule; however, such an interpretation remains conjectural, given the fact that we do not have the precise numbers about pre-Constantine conversions to Christianity in the old senatorial milieu. Some historians suggest that early conversions among the old aristocracy were more numerous than previously supposed.

Constantine's reforms had to do only with the civilian administration. The military chiefs had risen from the ranks since the Crisis of the Third Century but remained outside the Senate, in which they were included only by Constantine's children.

Monetary Reforms

In the 3rd century the production of fiat money to pay for public expenses resulted in runaway inflation, and Diocletian tried unsuccessfully to re-establish trustworthy minting of silver coins, as well as silver-bronze "billon" coins (the term "billon" meaning an alloy of precious and base metals that is mostly base metal). Silver currency was overvalued in terms of its actual metal content and therefore could only circulate at much discounted rates. Constantine stopped minting the Diocletianic "pure" silver *argenteus* soon after 305, while the "billon" currency continued to be used until the 360s. From the early 300s on, Constantine forsook any attempts at restoring the silver currency, preferring instead to concentrate on minting large quantities of the gold solidus, 72 of which made a pound of gold. New and highly debased silver pieces continued to be issued during his later reign and after his death, in a continuous process of retariffing, until this "billon" minting ceased in 367, and the silver piece was continued by various denominations of bronze coins, the most important being the *centenionalis*.

These bronze pieces continued to be devalued, assuring the possibility of keeping fiduciary minting alongside a gold standard. The author of *De Rebus Bellicis* held that the rift widened between classes because of this monetary policy; the rich benefited from the stability in purchasing power of the gold piece, while the poor had to cope with ever-degrading bronze pieces. Later emperors such as Julian the Apostate insisted on trustworthy mintings of the bronze currency.

Constantine's monetary policies were closely associated with his religious policies; increased minting was associated with the confiscation of all gold, silver, and bronze statues from pagan temples between 331 and 336 which were declared to be imperial property. Two imperial commissioners for each province had the task of getting the statues and melting them for immediate minting, with the exception of a number of bronze statues that were used as public monuments in Constantinople.

Executions of Crispus and Fausta

Constantine had his eldest son Crispus seized and put to death by "cold poison" at Pola (Pula, Croatia) sometime between 15 May and 17 June 326. In July, he had his wife Empress Fausta (stepmother of Crispus) killed in an overheated bath. Their names were wiped from the face of many inscriptions, references to their lives were eradicated from the literary record, and their memory was condemned. Eusebius, for example, edited out any praise of Crispus from later copies of *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and his *Vita Constantini* contains no mention of Fausta or Crispus. Few ancient sources are willing to discuss possible motives for the events, and the few that do are of later provenance and are generally unreliable. At the time of the executions it was commonly believed that Empress Fausta was either in an illicit relationship with Crispus or was spreading rumours to that effect. A popular myth arose, modified to allude to the Hippolytus–Phaedra legend, with the suggestion that Constantine killed Crispus and Fausta for their immoralities; the largely fictional *Passion of Artemius* explicitly makes this connection. The myth rests on slim evidence as an interpretation of the executions; only late and unreliable sources allude to the relationship between Crispus and Fausta, and there is no evidence for the modern suggestion that Constantine's "godly" edicts of 326 and the irregularities of Crispus are somehow connected.

Although Constantine created his apparent heirs "caesars", following a pattern established by Diocletian, he gave his creations a hereditary character, alien to the tetrarchic system: Constantine's caesars were to be kept in the hope of ascending to empire and entirely subordinated to their augustus, as long as he was alive. Adrian Goldsworthy speculates an alternative explanation for the execution of Crispus was Constantine's desire to keep a firm grip on his prospective heirs, this—and Fausta's desire for having her sons inheriting instead of their half-brother—being reason enough for killing Crispus; the subsequent execution of Fausta, however, was probably meant as a reminder to her children that Constantine would not hesitate in "killing his own relatives when he felt this was necessary".

Later Campaigns

Constantine considered Constantinople his capital and permanent residence. He lived there for a good portion of his later life. In 328, construction was completed on Constantine's Bridge at *Sucidava*, (today Celei in Romania) in hopes of reconquering Dacia, a province that had been abandoned under Aurelian. In the late winter of 332, Constantine campaigned with the Sarmatians against the Goths. The weather and lack of food reportedly cost the Goths dearly before they submitted to Rome. In 334, after Sarmatian commoners had overthrown their leaders, Constantine led a campaign against the tribe. He won a victory in the war and extended his control over the region, as remains of camps and fortifications in the region indicate. Constantine resettled some Sarmatian exiles as farmers in Illyrian and Roman districts and conscripted the rest into the army. Constantine reconquered the South of Dacia and the new frontier in Dacia was along the wall and ditch called Brazda lui Novac line supported by new *castra*. Constantine took the title *Dacicus maximus* in 336.

In the last years of his life, Constantine made plans for a campaign against Persia. In a letter written to the king of Persia, Shapur, Constantine had asserted his patronage over Persia's Christian subjects and urged Shapur to treat them well. The letter is undatable. In response to border raids, Constantine sent Constantius to guard the eastern frontier in 335. In 336, Prince Narseh invaded Armenia (a Christian kingdom since 301) and installed a Persian client on the throne. Constantine then resolved to campaign against Persia. He treated the war as a Christian crusade, calling for bishops to accompany the army and commissioning a tent in the shape of a church to follow him everywhere. Constantine planned to be baptised in the Jordan River before crossing into Persia. Persian diplomats came to Constantinople over the winter of 336–337, seeking peace, but Constantine turned them away. The campaign was called off, however, when Constantine became sick in the spring of 337.

Illness and Death

From his recent illness, Constantine knew death would soon come. Within the Church of the Holy Apostles, which he had built in Constantinople, Constantine had secretly prepared a final resting-place for himself. It came sooner than he had expected. Soon after the Feast of Easter 337, Constantine fell seriously ill. He left Constantinople for the hot baths near his mother's city of Helenopolis (Altınova), on the southern shores of the Gulf of Nicomedia (present-day Gulf of İzmit). There, in a church his mother had built in honour of Lucian the Martyr, he prayed, and there he realised that he was dying. Seeking purification, he became a catechumen and attempted a return to Constantinople, making it only as far as a suburb of *Nicomedia*. He summoned the bishops and told them of his hope to be baptised in the River Jordan, where Christ was written to have been baptised. He requested the baptism right away, promising to live a more Christian life should he live through his illness. The bishops, Eusebius records, "performed the sacred ceremonies according to custom". He chose the Arian bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia, bishop of the city where he lay dying, as his baptiser. In postponing his baptism, he followed one custom at the time which postponed baptism until after infancy. It has been thought that Constantine put off baptism as long as he did so as to be absolved from as much of his sin as possible. Constantine died soon after at a suburban villa called Achyron, on the last day of the fifty-day festival of Pentecost directly following Pascha (or Easter), on 22 May 337.

Although Constantine's death follows the conclusion of the Persian campaign in Eusebius's account, most other sources report his death as occurring in its middle. Emperor Julian (a nephew of Constantine), writing in the mid-350s, observes that the Sassanians escaped punishment for their ill-deeds, because Constantine died "in the middle of his preparations for war". Similar accounts are given in the *Origo Constantini*, an anonymous document composed while Constantine was still living, which has Constantine dying in *Nicomedia*;[291] the *Historiae abbreviatae* of Sextus Aurelius Victor, written in 361, which has Constantine dying at an estate near *Nicomedia* called Achyrona while marching against the Persians; and the *Breviarium* of Eutropius, a handbook compiled in 369 for the Emperor Valens, which has Constantine dying in a nameless state villa in *Nicomedia*. From these and other accounts, some have concluded that Eusebius's *Vita* was edited to defend Constantine's reputation against what Eusebius saw as a less congenial version of the campaign.

Following his death, his body was transferred to Constantinople and buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles, in a porphyry sarcophagus that was described in the 10th century by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus in the *De Ceremoniis*. His body survived the plundering of the city during the Fourth Crusade in 1204 but was destroyed at some point afterwards. A fragment of a sarcophagus that is believed to be Constantine's is currently on display at the Istanbul Archaeology Museums.

Constantine was succeeded by his three sons born of Fausta, Constantine II, Constantius II and Constans. His sons, along with his nephew Dalmatius, had already received one division of the empire each to administer as caesars; Constantine may have intended his successors to resume a structure akin to Diocletian's Tetrarchy. A number of relatives were killed by followers of Constantius, notably Constantine's nephews Dalmatius (who held the rank of caesar) and Hannibalianus, presumably to eliminate possible contenders to an already complicated succession. He also had two daughters, Constantina and Helena, wife of Emperor Julian.

Assessment and Legacy

Constantine reunited the empire under one emperor, and he won major victories over the Franks and Alamanni in 306–308, the Franks again in 313–314, the Goths in 332, and the Sarmatians in 334. By 336, he had reoccupied most of the long-lost province of Dacia which Aurelian had been forced to abandon in 271. At the time of his death, he was planning a great expedition to end raids on the eastern provinces from the Persian Empire.

In the cultural sphere, Constantine revived the clean-shaven face fashion of earlier emperors, originally introduced among the Romans by Scipio Africanus (236–183 BC) and changed into the wearing of the beard by Hadrian (r. 117–138). With some departures, such as Julian the Apostate (r. 360–363), this new Roman imperial fashion lasted until the reign of Phocas (r. 602–610) in the 7th century.

The Holy Roman Empire reckoned Constantine among the venerable figures of its tradition. In the later Byzantine state, it became a great honour for an emperor to be hailed as a "new Constantine"; ten emperors carried the name, including the last emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire. Charlemagne used monumental Constantinian forms in his court to suggest that he was Constantine's successor and equal. Charlemagne, Henry VIII, Philip II of Spain, Godfrey of Bouillon, House of Capet, House of Habsburg, House of Stuart, Macedonian dynasty and Phokas family claimed descent from Constantine. Geoffrey of Monmouth embroidered a tale that the legendary king of Britain, King Arthur, was also a descendant of Constantine. Constantine acquired a mythic role as a hero and warrior against heathens. His reception as a saint seems to have spread within the Byzantine empire during wars against the Sasanian Persians and the Muslims in the late 6th and 7th century. The motif of the Romanesque equestrian, the mounted figure in the posture of a triumphant Roman emperor, became a visual metaphor in statuary in praise of local benefactors. The name "Constantine" enjoyed renewed popularity in western France in the 11th and 12th centuries. During the Fascist period in Italy in the 20th century, parallels between Constantine and Mussolini became especially popular after the signing of the Lateran Pacts by the Italian State and the Catholic Church in 1929. Mussolini's perceived role in bringing about the historic agreement was sometimes even explicitly compared to Constantine's Edict of Milan. For example, the archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Ildefonso Schuster, claimed that, after sixteen centuries, a second March on Rome had occurred and a second 'religious pact' had been established, linking Mussolini to the *spiriti magni* of both Constantine and Augustus.

The Niš Constantine the Great Airport is named in honour of him. A large cross was planned to be built on a hill overlooking Niš, but the project was cancelled. In 2012, a memorial was erected in Niš in his honour. The *Commemoration of the Edict of Milan* was held in Niš in 2013. The Orthodox Church considers Constantine a saint (Άγιος Κωνσταντίνος, Saint Constantine), having a feast day on 21 May, and calls him *isapostolos* (ισαπόστολος Κωνσταντίνος)—an equal of the Apostles.

Constantine is sometimes associated with the religiopolitical ideology known as Caesaropapism, which epitomises the unity of church and state. However, his association with this ideology has been debated.

Historiography

During Constantine's lifetime, Praxagoras of Athens and Libanius, pagan authors, showered Constantine with praise, presenting him as a paragon of virtue. His nephew and son-in-law Julian the Apostate, however, wrote the satire *Symposium, or the Saturnalia* in 361, after the last of his sons died; it denigrated Constantine, calling him inferior to the great pagan emperors, and given over to luxury and greed. Following Julian, Eunapius began – and Zosimus continued – a historiographic tradition that blamed Constantine for weakening the empire through his indulgence to the Christians.

During the Middle Ages, European and Near-East Byzantine writers presented Constantine as an ideal ruler, the standard against which any king or emperor could be measured. The Renaissance rediscovery of anti-Constantinian sources prompted a re-evaluation of his career. German humanist Johannes Leunclavius discovered Zosimus' writings and published a Latin translation in 1576. In its preface, he argues that Zosimus' picture of Constantine offered a more balanced view than that of Eusebius and the Church historians. Cardinal Caesar Baronius criticised Zosimus, favouring Eusebius' account of the Constantinian era. Baronius' *Life of Constantine* (1588) presents Constantine as the model of a Christian prince. Edward Gibbon aimed to unite the two extremes of Constantinian scholarship in his work *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1789) by contrasting the portraits presented by Eusebius and Zosimus. He presents a noble war hero who transforms into an Oriental despot in his old age, "degenerating into a cruel and dissolute monarch".

Modern interpretations of Constantine's rule begin with Jacob Burckhardt's *The Age of Constantine the Great* (1853, rev. 1880). Burckhardt's Constantine is a scheming secularist, a politician who manipulates all parties in a quest to secure his own power.[] Henri Grégoire followed Burckhardt's evaluation of Constantine in the 1930s, suggesting that Constantine developed an interest in Christianity only after witnessing its political usefulness. Grégoire was skeptical of the authenticity of Eusebius's *Vita*, and postulated a pseudo-Eusebius to assume responsibility for the vision and conversion narratives of that work. Otto Seeck's *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt* (1920–1923) and André Piganiol's *L'empereur Constantin* (1932) go against this historiographic tradition. Seeck presents Constantine as a sincere war hero whose ambiguities were the product of his own naïve inconsistency. Piganiol's Constantine is a philosophical monotheist, a child of his era's religious syncretism. Related histories by Arnold Hugh Martin Jones (*Constantine and the Conversion of Europe*, 1949) and Ramsay MacMullen (*Constantine*, 1969) give portraits of a less visionary and more impulsive Constantine.

These later accounts were more willing to present Constantine as a genuine convert to Christianity. Norman H. Baynes began a historiographic tradition with *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church* (1929) which presents Constantine as a committed Christian, reinforced by Andreas Alföldi's *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome* (1948), and Timothy Barnes's *Constantine and Eusebius* (1981) is the culmination of this trend. Barnes' Constantine experienced a radical conversion which drove him on a personal crusade to convert his empire. Charles Matson Odahl's *Constantine and the Christian Empire* (2004) takes much the same tack. In spite of Barnes' work, arguments continue over the strength and depth of Constantine's religious conversion. Certain themes in this school reached new extremes in T. G. Elliott's *The Christianity of Constantine the Great* (1996), which presented Constantine as a committed Christian from early childhood. Paul Veyne's 2007 work *Quand notre monde est devenu chrétien* holds a similar view which does not speculate on the origin of Constantine's Christian motivation, but presents him as a religious revolutionary who fervently believed that he was meant "to play a providential role in the millenary economy of the salvation of humanity". Peter Heather argues that it is most plausible that Constantine had been a Christian considerably before 312 – possibly even for his entire life – with the public timeline of events instead reflecting his "coming out" as Christian in stages as doing so became politically viable. As a parallel illustrating the cogency of this interpretation, Heather gestures to the later conversion of Constantine's nephew Julian from Christianity to Hellenism, after which he practiced in secret for a decade.

Latin Christians considered it inappropriate that Constantine was baptised only on his death bed by an unorthodox bishop, and a legend emerged by the early 4th century that Pope Sylvester I had cured the pagan emperor from leprosy. According to this legend, Constantine was baptised and began the construction of a church in the Lateran Basilica. The *Donation of Constantine* appeared in the 8th century, most likely during the pontificate of Pope Stephen II, in which the freshly converted Constantine gives "the city of Rome and all the provinces, districts, and cities of Italy and the Western regions" to Sylvester and his successors. In the High Middle Ages, this document was used and accepted as the basis for the pope's temporal power, though it was denounced as a forgery by Emperor Otto III and lamented as the root of papal worldliness by Dante Alighieri. Philologist and Catholic priest Lorenzo Valla proved in 1440 that the document was indeed a forgery.

Donation of Constantine

The Donation of Constantine (Latin: *Donatio Constantini*) is a forged Roman imperial decree by which the 4th-century emperor Constantine the Great supposedly transferred authority over Rome and the western part of the Roman Empire to the Pope. Composed probably in the 8th century, it was used, especially in the 13th century, in support of claims of political authority by the papacy.

In many of the existing manuscripts, including the oldest, the document bears the title *Constitutum domini Constantini imperatoris*. The Donation of Constantine was included in the 9th-century Pseudo-Isidorean decretals. Lorenzo Valla, an Italian Catholic priest and Renaissance humanist, is credited with first exposing the forgery with solid philological arguments in 1439–1440, although the document's authenticity had been repeatedly contested since 1001.

Content

An alleged decree from Roman Emperor Constantine I, dated March 30 and not explicitly stating its year, incorrectly references the co-consul of Constantine I in his fourth term (315) as Gallicanus (317). Historical records confirm that these two never served as consuls together, indicating this as evidence of the document's forged nature. The forged imperial decree states that "Constantine" professes Christianity (*confessio*) and entitles to Pope Sylvester I several imperial insignia and privileges (*donatio*), as well as the Lateran Palace. Rome, the rest of Italy, and the western provinces of the empire are made over to the papacy.

The text recounts a narrative founded on the 5th-century *Acts of Sylvester*. This tale describes the sainted Pope Sylvester's rescue of the Romans from the depredations of a local dragon and the pontiff's miraculous cure of the emperor's leprosy by the sacrament of baptism. The story was rehearsed by the *Liber Pontificalis*; by the later 8th century the dragon-slayer Sylvester and his apostolic successors were rewarded in the Donation of Constantine with temporal powers never in fact exercised by the historical Bishops of Rome under Constantine.

In his gratitude, "Constantine" determined to bestow on the seat of Peter "power, and dignity of glory, vigor, and imperial honor," and "supremacy as well over the four principal sees: Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople, as also over all the churches of God in the whole earth". For the upkeep of the church of Saint Peter and that of Saint Paul, he gave landed estates "in Judea, Greece, Asia, Thrace, Africa, Italy and the various islands". To Sylvester and his successors he also granted imperial insignia, the tiara, and "the city of Rome, and all the provinces, places and cities of Italy and the western regions".

The Donation sought reduction in the authority of Constantinople; if Constantine I had elevated Pope Sylvester I to imperial rank before the inauguration of Constantinople in 330, then Sylvester, Rome's Patriarch would have had a lead of fifteen years in the contest for primacy among the patriarchates. Implicitly, the papacy asserted its supremacy and prerogative to transfer the imperial seat; the papacy had consented to the translatio imperii to Byzantium by Constantine and it could wrest back the authority at will.

Origin

It has been suggested that an early draft of the Donation of Constantine was made shortly after the middle of the 8th century, in order to assist Pope Stephen II in his negotiations with Pepin the Short, who then held the position of Mayor of the Palace (i.e., the manager of the household of the Frankish king). In 754, Pope Stephen II crossed the Alps to anoint Pepin king, thereby enabling the Carolingian family to supplant the old Merovingian royal line. In return for Stephen's support, Pepin gave the pope the lands in Italy which the Lombards had taken from the Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Empire. It is also possible it originated in the chancery of Stephen's immediate successor Paul I. These lands would become the Papal States and would be the basis of the papacy's temporal power for the next eleven centuries.

Another interpretation holds that the Donation was not an official forgery directed at Constantinople, but was instead a ploy in Roman ecclesiastical politics to bolster the status of the Lateran, which does have historical Constantinian connections, against the rising status of the Vatican, and it may have been composed by a Greek monk working in a Roman monastery. In one study, an attempt was made at dating the forgery to the 9th century, and placing its composition at Corbie Abbey, in northern France.

German medievalist Johannes Fried draws a distinction between the Donation of Constantine and an earlier, also forged version, the *Constitutum Constantini*, which was included in the collection of forged documents, the False Decretals, compiled in the latter half of the 9th century. Fried argues the Donation is a later expansion of the much shorter *Constitutum*. Christopher B. Coleman understands the mention in the *Constitutum* of a donation of "the western regions" to refer to the regions of Lombardia, Veneto, and Istria.

Medieval use and Reception

What may perhaps be the earliest known allusion to the Donation is in a letter of 778, in which Pope Hadrian I exhorts Charlemagne – whose father, Pepin the Short, had made the Donation of Pepin granting the Popes sovereignty over the Papal States – to follow Constantine's example and endow the Roman Catholic church. Otto III's chancery denied its authenticity.

The first pope to directly invoke the decree was Pope Leo IX, in a letter sent in 1054 to Michael I Cerularius, Patriarch of Constantinople. He cited a large portion of the document, believing it genuine, furthering the debate that would ultimately lead to the East–West Schism. In the 11th and 12th centuries, the Donation was often cited in the investiture conflicts between the papacy and the secular powers in the West.

The document's contents contradicted the Byzantines' notion that Constantine's *translatio imperii* transferred the seat of imperial authority from Rome to his foundation of Constantinople, named the "New Rome". Consequently, the Donation featured in the east–west dispute over ecclesiastical primacy between the patriarchal sees of Rome and New Rome. Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida also issued a version of the document to support the papacy's claims against the eastern emperors' and patriarchs' primacy.

By the 12th century the text existed in Greek translation, of which a 14th-century manuscript survives, and Byzantine writers were also using the Donation in their polemics; John Kinnamos, writing in the reign of eastern emperor Manuel I Komnenos, criticized western Staufer emperors as usurpers and denied the popes had the right to bestow the imperial office. Theodore Balsamon justified Michael Cerularius's behaviour in 1054 using the Donation as a rationale for his dismissal of the papal legation and the mutual excommunications that followed.

In 1248, the Chapel of St Sylvester in the Basilica of the Santi Quattro Coronati was decorated with fresco showing the story of the Roman baptism and Donation of Constantine.

In his *Divine Comedy*, written in the early 14th century, the poet Dante Alighieri wrote:

> *Ahi, Costantin, di quanto mal fu matre,*
> *non la tua conversion, ma quella dote*
> *che da te prese il primo ricco patre!*
>
> (Ah, Constantine, how much evil was born,
> not from your conversion, but from that donation
> that the first wealthy Pope received from you!)
>
> **—Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, canto 19, lines 115–117.**

Investigation

During the Middle Ages, the Donation was widely accepted as authentic, although Holy Roman Emperor Otto III did possibly raise suspicions as to the document's authenticity due to its making a gift to the See of Rome. It was not until the mid-15th century, with the revival of Classical scholarship and textual criticism, that humanists, and eventually the papal bureaucracy, began to realize that the document could not possibly be genuine. Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa declared it to be a forgery and spoke of it as an apocryphal work.

Later, the humanist and scholar Lorenzo Valla argued in his philological study of the text that the language used in manuscript could not be dated to the 4th century. The language of the text suggests that the manuscript can most likely be dated to the 8th century. Valla believed the forgery to be so obvious that he suspected that the Church knew the document to be inauthentic. Valla further argued that papal usurpation of temporal power had corrupted the church, caused the wars of Italy, and reinforced the "overbearing, barbarous, tyrannical priestly domination."

Independently of both Cusa and Valla, Reginald Pecocke, Bishop of Chichester (1450–57), reached a similar conclusion. Among the indications that the Donation is a forgery are its language and the fact that, while certain imperial-era formulas are used in the text, some of the Latin in the document could not have been written in the 4th century; anachronistic terms such as "fief" were used. Also, the purported date of the document is inconsistent with the content of the document itself, as it refers both to the fourth consulate of Constantine (315) as well as the consulate of Gallicanus (317).

Pope Pius II wrote a tract in 1453, five years before becoming pope, to show that though the Donation was a forgery, the papacy owed its lands to Charlemagne and its powers of the keys to Peter; however, he did not publish it.

Contemporary opponents of papal powers in Italy emphasized the primacy of civil law and civil jurisdiction, now firmly embodied once again in the Justinian *Corpus Juris Civilis*. The Florentine chronicler Giovanni Cavalcanti reported that, in the very year of Valla's treatise, Filippo Maria Visconti, Duke of Milan, made diplomatic overtures toward Cosimo de' Medici in Florence, proposing an alliance against the pope. In reference to the Donation, Visconti wrote: "It so happens that even if Constantine consigned to Sylvester so many and such rich gifts – which is doubtful, because such a privilege can nowhere be found – he could only have granted them for his lifetime: the empire takes precedence over any lordship."

Later, scholars further demonstrated that other elements, such as Sylvester's curing of Constantine, are legends which originated at a later time. Wolfram Setz, a recent editor of Valla's work, has affirmed that at the time of Valla's refutation, Constantine's alleged "donation" was no longer a matter of contemporary relevance in political theory and that it simply provided an opportunity for an exercise in legal rhetoric.

The bulls of Nicholas V and his successors made no further mention of the Donation, even when partitioning the New World, though the doctrine of "omni-insular" papal fiefdoms, developed out of the Donation's vague references to islands since Pope Nicholas II's grant of Sicily to Robert Guiscard, was deployed after 1492 in papal pronouncements on the overlapping claims of the Iberian kingdoms in the Americas and Moluccas, including *Inter caetera*, a bull that resulted in the Treaty of Tordesillas and the Treaty of Zaragoza. Valla's treatise was taken up vehemently by writers of the Protestant Reformation, such as Ulrich von Hutten and Martin Luther, causing the treatise to be placed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* in the mid-16th century.

The Donation continued to be tacitly accepted as authentic until Caesar Baronius in his *Annales Ecclesiastici* (published 1588–1607) admitted that it was a forgery, after which it was almost universally accepted as such. Some continued to argue for its authenticity; nearly a century after *Annales Ecclesiastici*, Christian Wolff still alluded to the Donation as undisputed fact.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia

During the medieval period, Britons regarded Constantine as a king of their own people, particularly associating him with Caernarfon in Gwynedd. While some of this is owed to his fame and his proclamation as emperor in Britain, there was also confusion of his family with Magnus Maximus's supposed wife Elen and her son, another Constantine (Welsh: *Custennin*). In the 12th century Henry of Huntingdon included a passage in his *Historia Anglorum* that the Emperor Constantine's mother was a Briton, making her the daughter of King Cole of Colchester. Geoffrey of Monmouth expanded this story in his highly fictionalised *Historia Regum Britanniae*, an account of the supposed Kings of Britain from their Trojan origins to the Anglo-Saxon invasion. According to Geoffrey, Cole was King of the Britons when Constantius, here a senator, came to Britain. Afraid of the Romans, Cole submits to Roman law so long as he retains his kingship. However, he dies only a month later, and Constantius takes the throne himself, marrying Cole's daughter Helena. They have their son Constantine, who succeeds his father as King of Britain before becoming Roman emperor.

Historically, this series of events is extremely improbable. Constantius had already left Helena by the time he left for Britain. Additionally, no earlier source mentions that Helena was born in Britain, let alone that she was a princess. Henry's source for the story is unknown, though it may have been a lost hagiography of Helena.